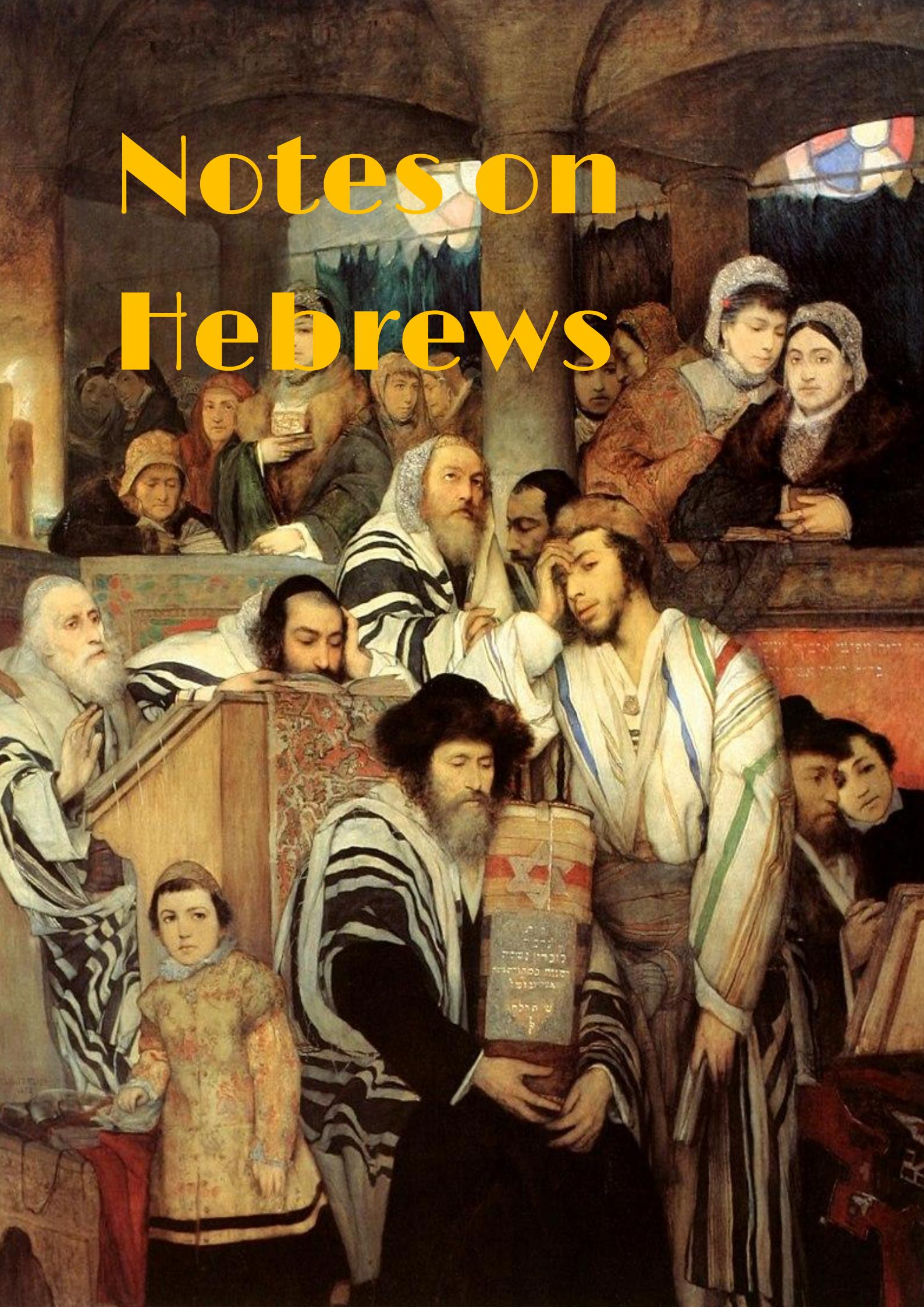


Notes on Hebrews



Painted in Vienna. The artist's self portrait is standing to the right of the seated rabbi, looking outwards. The inscription on the Torah scroll says "Donated in memory of our late honoured teacher and rabbi Moshe Gottlieb of blessed memory 1878"; it is an epitaph for the artist. All figures depict people from Gottlieb's early life in Drohobycz. The artist himself appears three times: as an adult wearing a pendant standing to the right of the Torah, as a child at lower left wearing the same pendant, and as a boy at the far right. The woman he courted, Laura Rosenfeld, appears twice: at the top left, standing and holding a closed prayer book, and second from the right on the top row, next to her mother.

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These short ministries were given between April 2005 and December 2012. During this period, on Sundays, we elected to study a book from the New Testament and a book from the Older Testament. We chose Hebrews and Proverbs.

Please note that many of the statistics and data quoted are from the time of writing and therefore will in many instances differ from those of today, statistics were also updated up until 2014.

My grateful thanks to Shelley, my amanuensis and my daughter, for proofing and updating this version, without whose help it would have languished in its original form.

Mike Winnett.

June 26th 2020

Hebrews Introduction

The book of Hebrews is supposedly written by the Apostle Paul but there is no evidence in the text of this. I will therefore refer to the "Writer of Hebrews".

It is a book full of references to the Old Testament but is not addressed to any particular church as are other books of the New Testament. *1Co 1:2 Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: Eph 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:*

In a sense it is not controversial. I have not found churches arguing over the interpretation of its subject matter which is more devotional than dogmatic. It is a book that paraphrases the Old Testament and reveals Christ in the Old Testament.

The opening verses set the scene for what is to follow "God's Son... the heir of all things by whom He made the worlds".

These worlds are of great comfort to us because at the start we have a God who can be known and a universe with meaning. *Act 17:3 Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.*

I get annoyed when I see the speculative science programmes on the television trying to put some other interpretation on the origins of our world and universe, why do they not see the truth? It is because they are blind and because of this they are to be pitied. *Joh 12:40 He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.*

We receive this truth as an act of faith as the writer explains later on and because this faith, a gift of God. *Heb 1:3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;*

Eph 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: It is in us and we have the key to the meaning of life. The cornerstone of this life is Jesus Christ. He made it and He inherits all that it would become. For now it is running its course to the end of time and Jesus sits in power with the Father "Show us the Father" asked Philip the Apostle. For many perhaps for us all, the concept of God is hard for us mortals to imagine. Jesus makes it easier for us. To look on Jesus is to look God in the face. *Joh 14:8 Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Joh 14:9 Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?*

Jesus is God. *Joh 20:28 And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. All that God*

is is revealed in Jesus, literally the “character” of His substance. Jesus God can therefore be understood by all ages of man. Children can come to Him, the sick can come to Him and the old can come to Him. He has a face for all of them and a word to all of them.

God does not get more personal than this. He is not hidden in some inner chamber accessible only by religious specialists.

He is, and I use the words with respect, The God of the people with the common touch. The God who did walk abouts, the God who could be touched, the God who picked up children, the God who walked the filthy streets of life to show us that God is a very real and approachable person.

Prophecies Fulfilled

There are 5 prophesies (fulfilled) in the first chapter of Hebrews. There are 19 mentioned in the whole book. We observed at the close of Luke’s Gospel that all scriptures will lead us eventually to the Cross and Christ on that cross and it is as if the writer of Hebrews is making that same point. Prophecy fulfilled or “I told you so”. He is confirming that Jesus is the promised Messiah and Saviour and that all of those ancient prophets lay silent so that Jesus can speak. *Heb 1:1 God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Heb 1:2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;*

Jesus is now “high above every name”, higher than the angels seated on the right hand of majesty with a more excellent name. *Heb 1:3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Heb 1:4 Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.* What is that name? That name is SON. The relationship with the Father is a mystery that we can only guess at but to the Jews it was blasphemy. *Joh 10:36 Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?*

What does the phrase “this day I have begotten thee” mean? Does it mean that Jesus was created a subordinate being? That He appeared in time as a creation of God? There are many who think so. The subordination of Christ (filial subordination) is not one of essence but of purpose. This verse is not talking about Jesus’ creation or even His incarnation and birth in Bethlehem. It is a quotation from the Psalms (Psalm 2), which looks at the triumph of God and His Son over the heathen. This triumph did not begin at the incarnation but at the resurrection from the dead, begetting again from the dead – not incarnation.

Jesus is a Son born out of the grave, a son delivered from the corruption of mortals. It is this proud cry from the father that announces Jesus coronation. My son whom you could not kill is now sitting in power on my right hand.

Never has the universe been more secure than now. *Psa 2:9 Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.* The triumph over sin, death and the grave

begets us also to a lively hope. *1Pe 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*, Did you notice at the funeral of Pope John Paul the big cross with Jesus nailed on it in Saint Peter's Square? How wrong that is. Jesus is not on the cross; the cross like the tomb is empty. He is risen, He is risen indeed, begotten from the dead. Life begins at the resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus the King

One of the characteristics of the Son of God is the passion for right and the hatred of wrong. *Heb 1:8 But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Heb 1:9 Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.*

At the start of His ministry He throws the moneychangers out of the Temple and has very heated exchanges with the Jews. *Joh 2:13 And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, Joh 2:14 And found in the Temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: Joh 2:15 And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the Temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; Joh 8:44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.*

It seems to me though that He is gentler when He sees that ignorance rather than stubbornness is at the root of sin. *Mar 10:17 And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? Mar 10:18 And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. Mar 10:19 Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. Mar 10:20 And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Mar 10:21 Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. Mar 10:22 And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.*

However Jesus still stands for truth. There are no shades of grey. He does not “um” and “ah” and say “it depends what you mean by right or wrong”. This characteristic is one that we too should develop. Our sinful world is beginning to hide sin and discourage us from exposing it. Political correctness now forbids us to condemn behaviour that is sinful. Do you think that Jesus would be silent if He were with us today? Jesus understood that power and influence of satan so should we.

In the past, men believed that the devil sat on your left shoulder speaking evil into your ear. This is why they threw salt over their left shoulder, to blind the devil. We should not be ignorant about the “devices” of the devil. *2Co 2:9 For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things. 2Co 2:10 To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I*

forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; 2Co 2:11 Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

Jesus is anointed above His fellows. What does this mean? Anointing with oil was a mark of consecration. *1Sa 16:1 And the LORD said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Bethlehemite: for I have provided me a king among his sons. 1Sa 16:12 And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he. 1Sa 16:13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah.* The oil symbolised the spirit of God coming upon the King, setting him apart for his duties. So it was that the Kings of Israel became known as "The Lord's anointed". *1Sa 12:3 Behold, here I am: witness against me before the LORD, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you.*

Jesus is therefore the king and His ascension to glory marks His coronation. I believe that it was this vision that sustained Him in the dark days of His earthly journey. *Heb 12:2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

So His anointing is with the oil of joy. *Heb 1:9 Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. Luk 1:44 For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.*

I do not know how people cope in this life with their approaching death, that dark unknown and unknowable wall that sweeps towards them. For the Christian it is not a wall it is a "dark glass" through which we can see a future, a glorious and joyous future. We should take a leaf from Jesus' book when life starts to get us down. We should look up and beyond to the same joy set before us.

[**Angels**](#)

We now come to a definition of Angels. *Heb 1:13 But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? Heb 1:14 Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?*

The word "Angel" is a transliteration of the Greek, and it means messenger. The word "Evangel" means a good message. The Sadducees did not believe in them but there is overwhelming evidence in the Bible for their existence. *Act 23:8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.*

In many respects they are like us or rather like our Spirits and in the resurrection we shall be even more like them. *Mat 22:30 For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but*

are as the angels of God in heaven.

How like us are they?

- **They were created by Christ.** *Col 1:16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: Gen 2:1 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.*
- **Have a nature.** (Christ did not assume it). *Heb 2:16 For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.*
- **Love and rejoice.** *Luk 15:10 Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repented.*
- **Desire.** *1Pe 1:12 Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.*
- **Contend.** *Rev 12:7 And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,*
- **Worship.** *Heb 1:6 And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.*
- **Come and go.** *Luk 9:26 For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels.*
- **Talk.** *Luk 1:13 But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.*
- **Have knowledge and wisdom.** *Mat 24:36 But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.*
- **Minister.** *Mat 13:49 So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, Luk 16:22 And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;*

Angels are in that privileged position of being able to view the continuity of human history since they do not die. Gabriel was present in the Old Testament and the New Testament. *Dan 8:16 And I heard a man's voice between the banks of Ulai, which called, and said, Gabriel, make this man to*

understand the vision. Dan 9:21 Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation. Luk 19:26 For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him.

As to the origin of angels the Bible gives us no information other than that they were created.

In the chapter before us in Hebrews it tells us that angels are Ministering Spirits. They delivered Lot from Sodom; they ministered to Jesus. *Mat 4:11 Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.*

Children have an Angel in Heaven (Their angels) *Mat 18:10 Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.*

An Angel delivered Peter from Jail. *Act 5:19 But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said,*

An Angel directed Philip on his way. *Act 8:26 And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.*

I think that there is enough evidence to say that there are personal guardian angels that watch over us and at times intervene in our lives to serve us and that according to Hebrews is their task as Ministering spirits.

Facing Danger

Heb 2:1 Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. Heb 2:2 For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; Heb 2:3 How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; Heb 2:4 God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?

The conclusion to the first chapter of Hebrews is in the opening verse of the second chapter, *Heb 2:1 Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.* It follows that we ought to give more earnest heed. I think that there is a great danger that with the passage of time we become complacent. We become “educated” as Christians and more at ease with our faith. Our faith becomes like a comfortable old chair that we can recline in and relax upon. The opening of the 2nd chapter of Hebrews to the contrary, suggests that we should be less comfortable and more active.

I don’t know whether you recall the terrible aeroplane crash on Tenerife where some 500 souls lost their lives (March 27, 1977). There were a number of confounding factors that led up to the event

but not everyone died. On the plane that was struck by the KLM jumbo jet that was taking off was an elderly couple. Years before as a boy, the husband had been in a cinema when it caught fire. He fortunately escaped but it left an indelible impression on his mind. How would he escape if the same situation arose again? It became a habit to identify escape routes and exits wherever he went. On the flight from Tenerife the man had paid particular attention to the safety procedures given by the stewardess and had made a mental note of the position of the escape hatches. When the planes collided the man knew just what to do. As the other passengers sat dazed in their seats the man grabbed his wife's hand and made for the escape hatch and left the plane. His wife recalled looking back at their friends and a woman still strapped in her seat with a blank expression on her face. Within one minute the fuel ignited and the whole plane went up in flames but the man saved his wife.

"How shall we escape" says the writer of Hebrews if we neglect so great a salvation". The man who escaped from the plane crash had never grown complacent about his safety and had never neglected to focus on his earthly salvation. He escaped.

The lesson is obvious. The world is a dangerous place. At every turn there are snares and dangers just waiting to destroy us, to kill our faith and steal our everlasting glory. Consider Samson who thought himself strong but was only so in the power of God's spirit. His neglect and complacency, through Delilah drained his spirituality until eventually he was only a shell of a man. Blind and mocked Samson's last call to God was "Let me die with the Philistines".

It does not have to end like that and we do not have to die with the Philistines. *Jdg 16:28 And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes. Jdg 16:29 And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left. Jdg 16:30 And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life. Jdg 16:31 Then his brethren and all the house of his father came down, and took him, and brought him up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the buryingplace of Manoah his father. And he judged Israel twenty years.*

Apostasy Now

In a survey conducted by "The Christian Magazine" (June 2005) it was noted that "the decline in UK church attendance has more to do with the lack in sincerity in preaching and an inability to defend Christianity at the pulpit than lack of faith". Leaders are ignorant and insincere! The problem is also getting much worse with declining church attendance.

In the 1851 Population Survey it was estimated that 60% of the UK population attended Church, with the majority attending non-conformist places of worship. Today (2006) the figure is about 7% having declined from 13% 20 years ago. I wouldn't be surprised if this is now halved! What has brought

about this state of affairs? At the root was the failure of the churches to spot the subtle errors and when they were spotted vigorously defend the faith.

It was 20 years before Spurgeon got involved in what was called the “Downgrade Controversy” (1878). This began with Darwins attack on human origins (1859) followed within 6 years, by a collapse of Evangelical faith.

Two major secular influences boosted the apostasy.

1. Higher (sic!) criticism and
2. Darwinism

Both of these pseudo-scientific concepts were rooted in mans attempt to redefine the world in which he lived.

We should remind ourselves that all brands of science are attempts to define and explain what already exists in the Universe. So called “discoveries” are merely coming to see what has lain undiscovered for millenniums. Science is basically the development of a set of “spectacles” by which we see creation more clearly. As we shall see the spectacles were flawed.

Let us look at the impact of Higher Criticism. At its root was the attempt to put scripture in the same league as other literature (see Balmforth “The Bible from the standpoint of Higher Criticism.pp 1 & 17). It’s very subtle because at the start you do not discredit the Bible as valuable and instructive; you demote it from the premiership to Division 3. You deny that it is “God breathed”. *2Ti 3:16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:* Darwin undermined the creation as taught in the Bible by the idea of special evolution. So the Bible was undermined scientifically and textually!

Darwin though was telling of things he could not substantiate (*Origins* p215) and men in his day could not refute. Let us remind ourselves that Darwin had no mechanisms for the change process he supported. He knew nothing of DNA or Genes, the codes for life and it was 100 years later in the 1950’s that Watson and Criek identified the double helix of DNA. I am surprised that no one applied the scientific method to his work i.e. creating a hypothesis, testing the hypothesis rigorously and formulating a rule.

From these two poisonous streams the churches were fed and watered until the damage was done and the churches were in decline. I still see these poisons as an issue for us today. We must learn to defend creationism and the veracity of scripture.

We must also learn that trying to interpret eternal truths with the human mind is fraught. *1Co 2:6 Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: 1Co 2:7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: 1Co 2:8 Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 1Co 2:9 But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. 1Co 2:10 But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of*

God. 1Co 2:11 For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. 1Co 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. 1Co 2:13 Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 1Co 2:14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. 1Co 2:15 But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. 1Co 2:16 For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

The natural man (*psykikos*) cannot receive the things of the spirit. There is something fundamentally flawed in his reasoning ability. Man's ability to learn, absorb information and manipulate data, he does with a "warped" mind, a biased mind and like a ship with a damaged rudder he will veer off in a particular direction away from God.

There is a judgement that also issues upon men when this happens. *Rom 1:19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. Rom 1:20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Rom 1:21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Rom 1:22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, Rom 1:23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Rom 1:24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:*

It is interesting to note that the rise in homosexuality has occurred against the backdrop of declining religion. A hundred years ago men were severely punished as homosexuals but now it is acceptable, indeed those who speak against it are the enemies of truth!

Keep Faith Fit

The second chapter of Hebrews opens with a warning that we must pay attention so that we don't "drift away" or "let slip" the things we have heard. The Greek word for "slip" is literally, "flow by". It is a beautiful analogy, for it paints the picture of a stream of water flowing its course. The stream in our case is the Word of God and we should not, we are advised let it flow by and out of our lives.

We are confronted with this danger the longer we are in the faith. When faith is young we care for it and tend it. Complacency and neglect are the vices that set in with time. Faith like a new toy or possession is treated well when first obtained but with age it is treated less carefully. As a consequence it is more likely to suffer damage with age. Rather than paying less attention we are warned to pay MORE attention. The proverb "familiarity breeds contempt" is so true in this context. As we saw last time the decline in church attendance was mirrored by the decline in faithfulness to God's word. The old stream was damned, dried up and a new river cut in its place.

So we must give “much more” (the Greek word is translated “more frequent”) “more exceedingly” attention or heed. *2Co 11:23 Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Mar 15:14 Then Pilate said unto them, Why, what evil hath he done? And they cried out the more exceedingly, Crucify him.*

This word “heed” is translated “beware”, “regard” and “attendance”. *Mat 7:15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Act 8:11 And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. 1Ti 4:13 Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.*

To use an analogy of training, we must train more and harder as we go on in our Christian lives. We are “fighters”. *1Co 9:26 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: 1Ti 6:12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses. 2Ti 4:7 I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Heb 10:32 But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions;*

We cannot afford to get flabby and out of condition, with age we should become stronger not weaker. *Deu 33:25 Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.*

My sadness for this generation is that there are very few strong older Christians. The generation of mighty men has passed away.

The World to Come

The writer takes you forward in time to “the world to come”. The Greek word is derived from the word house or habitation, so we are looking at the “habitation to come”. This new home is not run by angels the messengers of God. It is not a celestial old peoples home. *Heb 2:5 For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak.* The world to come is the home of saved man. The writer then reflects upon the state and the origin of man by quoting from the 8th Psalm.

It is no doubt something that troubles man when he looks out at the immensity of space and asks “who am I in the vastness of all of this?” How could a god be interested in me any more than I am concerned for ants?” Size is not important! The Lord God put man over the works of His hands such that man enjoyed a special relationship with his creator. *Gen 1:28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. Heb 2:7 Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands:*

Although in this time man is a little “lower” than the angels, his destiny is above the angels. The position of the angels is now acknowledged by head coverings. *1Co 11:10 For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels.* Even in the absence of a man a woman

covers her head because the angels are for now higher beings. So there you have the answer to the question “should I cover my head in private prayers?”

If I may use the term evolution, it is true to say that man, redeemed man is evolving, perhaps developing is a better word. In the resurrection man is like the angels, elevated above the world. *Mat 22:30 For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.* If you have every wondered why God created butterflies you may see a spiritual analogy here. Romans uses the word “metamorphosis” for the change that we are undergoing. *Rom 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.* We go from being a maggot to a butterfly.

Such is our ascension that we shall be above the angels. We shall judge the angels and with Christ we come to judge the world. *1Co 6:1 Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints? 1Co 6:2 Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? 1Co 6:3 Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life? Jud 1:6 And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. Jud 1:14 And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, Jud 1:15 To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.*

Have you ever thought about that? We shall judge the world! Only a person who is righteous is in a position to judge others. That is your position in Christ. The CEV puts it nicely. *Rom 8:1 If you belong to Christ Jesus, you won't be punished.* So as we saw Joshua (our grandson) baptised a few weeks ago, we can rejoice with him, that the punishment and judgement God has reserved for the wicked is not for him. More than that however, he will join us in judging the world when Jesus swoops down with his cloud of Saints.

Mans Task

The task given to man by God was unfulfilled because of sin. *Gen 1:27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. Gen 1:28 And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. Gen 1:29 And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.*

We see only mans failure, all day and everyday on the News. Yet against this we see Jesus triumphant “but we see Jesus..... that He might taste death for everyman”. *Heb 2:9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.* The pinnacle of Christ’s work,

His atoning death secures for man what Adam failed to do. *1Co 15:21 For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. 1Co 15:22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.* Thus in Christ we are super conquerors. *Rom 8:37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.*

What does it mean that Jesus should “taste death”? The word “taste” means to experience. *Mat 16:28 Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom. Luk 14:24 For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper. Joh 8:52 Then said the Jews unto him, Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and thou sayest, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death.*

What do we mean by death? In its origin death meant separation from God, spiritual death is the consequence of sin or as Paul puts it, what God pays you for your wickedness and summarises the fact. *Gen 2:17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. Eph 2:1 And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Rom 7:23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. Rom 5:12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:*

So then when Christ "tastes death" He experiences the separation from God. *Mat 27:46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

There is a sense in which mankind although separated from God does not experience the full weight of that separation. Many on the road to hell think that they are on the road to heaven. They would be most offended if you said that they were not and they “worship” each Sunday the god of their own making.

Why is it that men are in the state of separation without the consciousness of that separation? It is because they are not aware of sin working in their lives, they are not aware of the fatal disease. If they were it would shock and frighten them as it did Adam. *Gen 3:8 And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.* How many people this week will receive knowledge that they are carrying the seeds of a fatal disease, yet they have no consciousness that it is present and working death in their lives?

Paul in Romans chapter 7 shows that the knowledge of God’s law brought sin to life and that delight he had as a Pharisee, as a regular church goer was turned to wretchedness by sin working in his life. *Rom 7:9 For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. Rom 7:22 For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: Rom 7:23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. Rom 7:24 O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*

He was tasting death.

When we see Jesus, we see one who has tasted death. If we should not be able yet to experience that in our own lives we can experience it in His. We can see His suffering and His walk with God. The question arising from this though is, are the benefits of Christ's death universally available to all men? The verse in Hebrews states "that he might taste death on behalf of all". "All" who? All mankind without exception? All believers? We shall explore this.

Sacrifice and Substitute

What does the phrase "taste death for every man" mean? *Heb 2:9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.*

Firstly the word "man" is not in the original text, better it should be "taste death on behalf of (Greek "hyper") all". It implies a substitution. *Rom 8:32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Rom 5:6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. Rom 5:7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. Rom 5:8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Gal 3:13 Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: 1Ti 2:5 For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; 1Ti 2:6 Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.*

Christ acts as a substitute for us, hence we use the term "vicarious sacrifice" (a Vicar is a substitute). The idea of substitution is at the heart of the Old Testament sacrificial system. *Lev 1:2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, If any man of you bring an offering unto the LORD, ye shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd, and of the flock. Lev 1:3 If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the Tabernacle of the congregation before the LORD. Lev 1:4 And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.*

The sacrifice is accepted in the place of the offerer, "it shall be forgiven him". *Lev 4:35 And he shall take away all the fat thereof, as the fat of the lamb is taken away from the sacrifice of the peace offerings; and the priest shall burn them upon the altar, according to the offerings made by fire unto the LORD: and the priest shall make an atonement for his sin that he hath committed, and it shall be forgiven him.*

The sacrifice of Christ is as the "Lamb of God" is in perfect harmony with the concept of Justice laid out in the Old Testament.

One of the prerequisites of a sacrifice was that it had to be pure and without blemish, pointing to the perfect sacrifice of Christ, but what we may ask was the relationship between the sacrifice and the sin (not the sinner)? Could every man in Israel afford an ox? What provision had God provided

for the poor? This is beautifully illustrated in the passage describing “the leper cleansed” (Leviticus 14). *Lev 1:3 If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the Tabernacle of the congregation before the LORD.*

Leprosy was the same for all, so I allude that sin is the same for all and the failure of one point makes us guilty of all sin has no degrees. *Jas 2:10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.*

There are no “worse” sins than others. In that sense we were all lepers and doomed to a life outside of God’s camp.

When the leper was cleansed provision was made for the poor who did not have the same resources as his wealthier brothers. *Lev 14:22 And two turtledoves, or two young pigeons, such as he is able to get; and the one shall be a sin offering, and the other a burnt offering. Lev 14:23 And he shall bring them on the eighth day for his cleansing unto the priest, unto the door of the Tabernacle of the congregation, before the LORD. Lev 14:24 And the priest shall take the lamb of the trespass offering, and the log of oil, and the priest shall wave them for a wave offering before the LORD:*

The sacrifice therefore did not have to be in proportion to the disease. In other words it was not a “pecuniary sacrifice”, a sacrifice like money. For example, the thief had to pay double restitution irrespective of being a rich or poor thief. *Exo 22:7 If a man shall deliver unto his neighbour money or stuff to keep, and it be stolen out of the man's house; if the thief be found, let him pay double.* That principle did not apply with regard to sin against God. God’s justice is “forensic” or legal and there is no proportionality such that man can ever meet the demand of that justice. God had shown that He would make provision for forgiveness, no matter what the state of the individual so that forgiveness was not beyond any soul.

Those earthly sacrifices though were symbolic and pointed forward to the subject of our ministry – **Jesus**. *Heb 9:13 For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: Heb 9:14 How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*

Justice

Last week we attempted to show that Christ’s sacrifice was a judicial act of forensic justice, not a pecuniary sacrifice. In other words it is infinite in its capacity to appear and in this sense it is “tasting death for all”. It satisfied God’s justice. In order to further illustrate God’s justice in this respect let us consider that God had chosen not to forgive any man. Would Jesus have had to die? The answer is YES. Jesus death is not just about saving sinners, it is about the justice of God the Father. *Rom 3:25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; Rom 3:26 To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which*

believeth in Jesus.

“To declare His righteousness”. How else would God have declared His righteousness? By punishing sinners? No – that shows WRATH and ANGER. God’s justice is shown by punishing sin and removing it, by atonement. In the Old Testament on the Day of Atonement, the first sacrifice was not for the people, it was for the Sanctuary, the Holy Place, and the Tabernacle. *Lev 16:16 And he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins: and so shall he do for the Tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness.* It was a sacrifice to remove the general pollution of sin and to enable God to continue to live amongst a sinful people. If God had chosen not to accept the people of Israel, the Day of Atonement still reflected the Justice of God.

What then is the connection between the death of Christ and the forgiveness of man? Christ’s infinite sacrifice does not automatically apply to sinful men. It must be applied. The blood of the atonement must be sprinkled to make the sacrifice effective. *Lev 16:15 Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the vail, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat, and before the mercy seat:*

All men are born sinners so there must be a time and a place where the forgiveness of Christ is applied otherwise men would be born saved. The point I am making is that the death of Christ is of itself of no effect in the life of a man unless God the Father applies the benefits to him. It is not put to our account until a number of things take place. *Rom 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. Rom 8:29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Rom 8:30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. Rom 8:31 What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?*

This sequence of events has been called the “Golden Chain”.

God in the first case chooses those that He will apply the benefits and merits of Christ His Son to. It is the prerogative of the Potter. *Rom 9:21 Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? Rom 9:22 What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction:* The predestination of God’s issues in “calling”.

That calling comes through God’s word and it may appear from our human point like a “broadcast”, the sower sowing in hope, not knowing what may spring up but God does know. *Rom 10:17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* The response that God expects from those He predestinates is repentance. *Mar 6:12 And they went out, and preached that men should repent. Act 2:38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.*

Repentance is genuine sorrow for sinning against God and a genuine desire to reform the soul. It

carries with it the conviction of sin. Following repentance is conversion, another act of God, “be converted”. *Act 3:19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;*

Many people may receive the “call” of the Gospel but few are “chosen”. *Mat 22:14 For many are called, but few are chosen.*

We can see this all too clearly in our own day and age with people attending a religious service with no personal knowledge of Christ’s forgiveness and salvation. They are not “effectually” called!

I was meditating on an analogy to summarise this ministry and I have come up with this. Salvation is like a software package. You are the computer. The package contains a handbook (Bible) and the programme (CD) that will be downloaded into your soul.

The package is freely available from the Creator. You can get your own copy from God. When you load it, it comes with an agreement statement and your special password that makes it a valid copy. There are many people who have “pirate” copies with no genuine validation and these will not work properly. God will disown them. *1Jn 4:1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.* Others try to change the agreement and make up other conditions; these too will be disowned. *Joh 8:31 Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;*

There are also likely to be many people who do not get the best out of the “software” because they never read the handbook enough (all those hidden features in the “menu”).

So to return to our text “taste death for all”, we see that the death of Jesus has infinite capacity to forgive all people but that it is not applied to all people. The merits of Christ are dispensed by the Sovereign Hand of God the Father who from eternity has decreed those unworthy souls who will be the beneficiaries of His mercy and Grace.

Perfection

Heb 2:10 For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

How is it that Jesus as God is not perfect? Surely perfection is part of His very nature. The word perfect (*Teleioo*) is derived from *TELOS* (remember Telescope). It is used variously to describe:

“Finish” *Joh 4:34 Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work. Joh 5:36 But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me. Act 20:24 But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.*

“Fulfilled” Luk 2:43 *And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it.*

“Perfect” 2Co 12:9 *And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Heb 7:19 For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God. Heb 12:23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,*

The idea then in this concept of “perfection” is coming to a fuller and more complete understanding of the human condition. It is something that we ourselves can understand. Life can be read about or observed but there is a vast emotional chasm between that and personal experience. Until you have experienced pain, grief, sorrow or love it is just a word. I cannot for a moment fully understand what it feels like to lose a beloved member of my family. It is these feelings and emotions that make us human and distinguish us from animals. Such feelings are only experienced in life and cannot be experienced vicariously.

It seems that is one of the self limitations of God that He does not fully or intuitively understand the human condition other than by entering into it. The ideas of God’s self limitations are seen elsewhere. Jer 31:34 *And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*

Jesus then, God with us, came to a fuller and more complete understanding of the human condition through the things that he suffered. Jesus did not use the privilege of rank and birth to avoid the experiences of the common man, the captain or prince (Gk. ARKEGOS) of our salvation is truly one with us. Act 3:15 *And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. Act 5:31 Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.*

As one of the hymn writers observed “Well our feeble frame He knows”. Jesus immersed Himself in life so that He could be one with us. This is a token of God’s sincerity and genuine desire not simply to redeem us from sin but also to come to understand us and be one with us. We cannot rise to understand the mind of God but He can stoop to understand the mind of man and in that stoop lift us above the miseries of human existence.

Sanctification

Heb 2:11 For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren. We have in our verse here two words that require definition if we are to correctly understand our relationship to Christ.

The first word is “sanctify”. It means to “set apart” as for example in Exodus chapter 13. Exo 13:1 *And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Exo 13:2 Sanctify unto me all the firstborn,*

whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine. Exo 13:3 And Moses said unto the people, Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out from this place: there shall no leavened bread be eaten. Exo 13:4 This day came ye out in the month Abib. Exo 13:5 And it shall be when the LORD shall bring thee into the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which he sware unto thy fathers to give thee, a land flowing with milk and honey, that thou shalt keep this service in this month. Exo 13:6 Seven days thou shalt eat unleavened bread, and in the seventh day shall be a feast to the LORD. Exo 13:7 Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days; and there shall no leavened bread be seen with thee, neither shall there be leaven seen with thee in all thy quarters. Exo 13:8 And thou shalt shew thy son in that day, saying, This is done because of that which the LORD did unto me when I came forth out of Egypt. Exo 13:9 And it shall be for a sign unto thee upon thine hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes, that the LORD'S law may be in thy mouth: for with a strong hand hath the LORD brought thee out of Egypt. Exo 13:10 Thou shalt therefore keep this ordinance in his season from year to year. Exo 13:11 And it shall be when the LORD shall bring thee into the land of the Canaanites, as he sware unto thee and to thy fathers, and shall give it thee, Exo 13:12 That thou shalt set apart unto the LORD all that openeth the matrix, and every firstling that cometh of a beast which thou hast; the males shall be the LORD'S. Exo 13:13 And every firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb; and if thou wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break his neck: and all the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem. Exo 13:14 And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What is this? that thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the LORD brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage: Exo 13:15 And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the LORD slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man, and the firstborn of beast: therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all that openeth the matrix, being males; but all the firstborn of my children I redeem.

In this instance the Lord reminds Israel how in the great Exodus He saved their first born by sacrifice. He marked them out and separated them from others in Egypt.

Keeping the Sabbath was a sign of sanctification. *Exo 31:13 Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that ye may know that I am the LORD that doth sanctify you. Exo 31:14 Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Exo 31:15 Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Exo 31:16 Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. It carried an obligation to do it on penalty of death. If you were a heathen you were outside of the Covenant but if you became a Son of Israel you were obliged to follow the rules. Sanctification carried obligations removing the right to do as you pleased.*

What is it that sanctifies the followers of Jesus? It is His Word. *Joh 17:17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. Joh 17:18 As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. Joh 17:19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.* Christians have often been called and rightly so, people of the book. Their belief

that they are governed in word and deed by the Bible sets them apart from all other religions.

So it is that sanctification becomes a term describing believers “Called Saints”. No sanctification means no relationship with Jesus. *1Co 1:2 Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: 1Co 1:30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:*

The second word we define here is “brother”. Family relationships pale into insignificance in the face of the relationship with Christ. We have to see and accept that our love for Christ far exceeds our love for all else in this world. *Mat 10:35 For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. Mat 10:36 And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. Mat 10:37 He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Mat 10:38 And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.*

Putting relatives upon a pedestal above Christ is a sin.

We also see that from Christ’s family perspective, what you may call a brother (in a physical sense) is not what He calls a brother. *Mat 12:46 While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Mat 12:47 Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. Mat 12:48 But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? Mat 12:49 And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! Mat 12:50 For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.* He recognises only the faithful as His brother. It’s not about ceremonies, services, organisations and all the trappings associated with Christianity. It is about getting it right, personally with Christ. Get it right and “He is not ashamed of you as a brother”. How many though are a shame and a disgrace to Him because they pretend to be a brother and disobey Him?

Power over Death

Heb 2:11 For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, Heb 2:12 Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee. Heb 2:13 And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me. Heb 2:14 Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; Heb 2:15 And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

Jesus took our form in order to destroy the devil. In 1 Corinthians the word “destroy” is rendered “bring to nought”, the final steps in the demise of satan. *1Co 1:28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:* What does it mean when it says that the devil had the power of death? Surely we do not

mean that he is in control of the day I will die or can kill at will?

This is certainly not the case as we can prove from Job. *Jon 2:1 Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly, Jon 2:2 And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou hearest my voice. Jon 2:3 For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. Jon 2:4 Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy Temple. Jon 2:5 The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. Jon 2:6 I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God. Jon 2:7 When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy Temple.*

The devil is limited and subject to the authority of God. God alone has the authority over death. *Joh 10:15 As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. The devil has no more authority over death than Pontius Pilate. Joh 19:10 Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Joh 19:11 Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.*

The keys of death and hell are firmly in the grip of Jesus. *Rev 1:18 I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.* So how does the devil have the power of death? *Heb 2:14 Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;*

We would I think, understand this better if we were fluent in Greek as the Christians of the New Testament were. The word “power” is elsewhere rendered “strength” and “dominion”. *Luk 1:51 He hath shewed strength with his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. 1Pe 5:11 To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.* Kratos means strength or “grip upon”.

Satan has a grip upon death in so far as he holds men in fear of it because they have spent a life in bondage to sin. The devil is the most miserable of God’s creatures. He translates his misery into the lifetimes of millions of souls; he leads them in fear to the gates of death and watches their eternal torment as they cross over. He will join them. *Rev 20:10 And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*

Death is described as “the last enemy”. *1Co 15:50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. 1Co 15:51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 1Co 15:52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 1Co 15:53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 1Co 15:54 So when this corruptible shall have put on*

incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. 1Co 15:55 O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? 1Co 15:56 The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. 1Co 15:57 But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1Co 15:58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

What makes death painful and what the devil uses to create that pain is sin. *Eph 2:2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:* If the grip of sin is broken then the sting of death is drawn.

Jesus has delivered us from the curse of the law, forgiven our sin and translated us from satan's kingdom, so now death holds no fear or horrors – it is part of the natural process or our development. Why? Because "flesh and blood" cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. *1Co 15:50 Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.* It is a new kingdom and a spiritual kingdom. New lives with new bodies. For us what the world calls death will be a transition, like waking from a beautiful sleep. *1Co 15:51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 1Co 15:52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 1Co 15:53 for this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.*

God Identifying with Us

Heb 2:16 For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Heb 2:17 Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. Heb 2:18 For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.

Our verses show how God identifies with us. The hymn writer correctly noted "Well our feeble frame He knows". It is one thing to design a device it is another to test it. That knowledge of our humanity and its strengths and weaknesses were discovered by Jesus in His incarnation. He shows us just what we are capable of.

We note that He did not come as an angel for we could not identify with an angel. He came as the seed of Abraham. Interestingly the writer of Hebrews does not say "seed of Adam". Why? Abraham is particularly associated with the believers. *Rom 4:9 Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. Rom 4:10 How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. Rom 4:11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness*

might be imputed unto them also: Rom 4:12 And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised. Rom 4:13 For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. Rom 4:14 For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect:

In Genesis (chapter 15), Abraham looks out over history and sees his children to be. Not just earthly Israelites but all those faithful children in Christ. Among those stars he saw you! You are a star!

Abraham rejoiced to see Christ's day and was glad because he could also see in that day the benefits of reconciliation. Abraham also knew something of what it was like to be God for had he not also offered up his only begotten son on the altar of obedience?

More than this, the suffering of Christ and the trials of Christ became a repository of comfort for the people of God. *Gen 15:18 In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:*

The word tempted has also been translated "tried". *Rev 2:10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.* It was the word used to describe the devil's actions against Christ and the actions of the Pharisees "proving", Jesus. *Mat 4:1 Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. Joh 6:6 And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.*

There is a great truth revealed here. You need never be alone in the trials of life. *Heb 13:5 Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.* The word succour is also translated "help", help that is always at hand. *Mar 9:22 And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.* How do we draw that help? It is by drawing down the mind of Christ. *Php 2:5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:*

By letting Jesus into our lives, by inviting Him into our minds we will download the help and strength for any situation.

God's Home

Heb 3:1 Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; Heb 3:2 Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house.

In the first two chapters of Hebrews the writer has put Jesus firmly in the relation to the creation and the created beings – angels. In the third chapter he puts Jesus in relation to Moses and hence the Jewish religion. This is one of the great joys of our Christian faith, namely that it is "open plan". There are no secret components, hidden rooms, or cellars where we cannot go. There are lights on in every room.

The analogy of our faith as a house is used in the passage before us, Jesus being the high priest over the house of God. *Heb 10:21 And having an high priest over the house of God;*

In John's gospel Jesus speaks of this house as our eternal resting place where he will furnish our rooms. I often wonder how much Christians really focus on this great heavenly house and how much they are locked into their earthly homes.

You will no doubt have been informed of a prayer meeting next week for Jim Carswell¹ at Easthampstead Baptist Church. There have also been requests for prayer, but no one has said what to pray. "Pray for me" is a really vague term like saying "sorry". I cannot speak for him but I can speak for myself and should I ever be in Jim's position I ask this prayer, "that the Lord would take me to his house (I want no recovery) and take me swiftly and that my soul be found right and at peace with Christ".

In John's gospel troubled hearts are at rest in God's home through Christ. *Joh 14:1 Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. Joh 14:2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.*

Therefore as the writer of Hebrews says we should "consider" him or put him in mind. Christ was the sole topic of Spurgeon's "house" – these were the opening words at the Metropolitan Tabernacle. David Livingstone said, "I will place no value on anything that I have or possess except in relation to the Kingdom of Christ". Do you ever get embarrassed when you hear Christ being preached? Do you think that you can talk too much about Christ? Then check your booking in the house of God – you may not have a room.

Christians never tire of hearing Christ.

Hear His Voice

Heb 3:7 Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, Heb 3:8 Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness:

Thee verses are taken from a Psalm of David but they are attributed to the Holy Spirit, proving David wrote by the inspiration of the spirit. *Psa 95:7 For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. To day if ye will hear his voice,*

Often when we hear the word "you" for example "Today if **you** will hear his voice", we will refer the words to others. "You" is everyone else but me. This could not be further from the truth and it is still further from the truth to imply that these words are for unbelievers. In the context the "you" are the Israelites so it is clear that the verses apply to the people of God. *Heb 3:12 Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.*

¹ Jim was a fellow elder at Woodenhill Fellowship until 1993. In 2005 he was involved in a road accident. After spending 1 ½ years in a coma he expired.

There was a day when we all heard His voice and rejoiced since that was how we became Israelites but we are no longer in the “past”, we are in “today”.

“Today” if you will hear His voice. Why should it ever be called into question that we would not hear His voice?

Well scripture is replete with examples of people who start well and end badly. Solomon is just such a one. *1Ki 3:3 And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father: only he sacrificed and burnt incense in high places. 1Ki 11:1 But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites;* His affections moved away from His God and his ears opened to his “strange wives”.

It is the hard heart that stops a man from serving his God. The Greek word for harden is where we derive the word “sclerosis” from and the word for heart is “cardia”. The problem is cardiosclerosis. You will know from science that heat makes things softer and pliable but cold makes them hard and brittle. When the light of God, His warmth and love are shut out, the cold, dark, winter of disobedience descends and the heart ceases to function. It is frozen hard. You will notice this in the aged more than the young and where is something in the old person that becomes fixed and stubborn. They dislike change, cannot be flexible, become as we say “fixed in their ideas and ways” and find it hard to learn new things.

Beware that age does not trap you in a cage. The gospel encourages the child in you, born to trust the heavenly parent, unquestioning in obedience, ever ready to listen, not just yesterday but today and forever. *Mat 18:3 And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Amen.*

A Warning from God

It is good that we start our new year with a warning from God.

Heb 3:8 Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness. This is a warning to those who profess Christianity to watch their ways and it is drawn from the Old Testament. To those who think Christ melts the nature of a Sovereign God and allows familiarity and flexibility let this be an admonition, God has not changed His nature because Christ died. He still hates provocation. This word derives from the Greek πικραίνω, to make bitter; the exasperation or bitter provocation. I am sure that you have been exasperated with your children so you know the feelings of frustration and anger that it generates.

The children of Israel (and children is so appropriate) exasperated God on many occasions.

Firstly in the wilderness of Sinai when they murmured for want of bread and had the manna given to them. *Exo 16:4 Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no.*

Secondly at Rephadim this time for want of water and insolently saying “Is the Lord God among us or not?” on which account the place was called Massah and Meribah. *Exo 17:2 Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the LORD?* *Exo 17:3 And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?* *Exo 17:4 And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, what shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me.* *Exo 17:5 And the LORD said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go.* *Exo 17:6 Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink.* And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. *Exo 17:7 And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?* *Exo 17:8 Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim.* *Exo 17:9 And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: to morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand.*

Thirdly from Rephidim they went into the wilderness of Sinai where they received the law, in the beginning of the third year from their coming out of Egypt. Here they provoked God again by making the golden calf. *Exo 32:10 Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.* After the law was given they were commanded to go directly to Canaan and take possession of the Promised Land.

The Israelites having received this order departed from Horeb and went forward three days' journey till they came to Taberah, where they provoked God the **Fourth** time by murmuring for want of flesh to eat and for that sin were smitten with a very great plague. This place was called Kibroth-hattaavah because there they buried the people who lusted. *Num 10:33 And they departed from the mount of the LORD three days' journey: and the ark of the covenant of the LORD went before them in the three days' journey, to search out a resting place for them.* *Num 11:3 And he called the name of the place Taberah: because the fire of the LORD burnt among them.* *Num 11:33 And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague.*

From Kibroth-hattaavah they went to Hazeroth and from thence into the wilderness of Paran to a place called Kadesh. *Num 11:35 And the people journeyed from Kibrothhattaavah unto Hazeroth; and abode at Hazeroth.* *Num 12:16 And afterward the people removed from Hazeroth, and pitched in the wilderness of Paran* *Num 13:26 And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land.*

Seeing the land before them the people wanted to send spies to bring them an account of the land and of its inhabitants. *Deu 1:22 And ye came near unto me every one of you, and said, We will send men before us, and they shall search us out the land, and bring us word again by what way we must go up, and into what cities we shall come.* These, after forty days, returned to Kadesh and excepting for Caleb and Joshua, they all agreed in bringing an evil report of the land, whereby the people were

so discouraged that they refused to go up and proposed to make a captain and return into Egypt. *Num 13:25 And they returned from searching of the land after forty days. Num 13:26 And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land. Num 13:27 And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it. Num 13:28 Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there. Num 13:29 The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains: and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan. Num 13:30 And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it. Num 13:31 But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we. Num 13:32 And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature.*

So for a **Fifth** time having shown an absolute disbelief of God's promises and an utter distrust of his power, God swears that not one of that generation should enter Canaan except Caleb and Joshua but should all die in the wilderness and ordered them to turn and go into the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea. *Num 14:4 And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt. Num 14:20 And the LORD said, I have pardoned according to thy word: Deu 1:34 And the LORD heard the voice of your words, and was wroth, and sware, saying, Deu 1:35 Surely there shall not one of these men of this evil generation see that good land, which I sware to give unto your fathers,*

In that wilderness the Israelites as Moses informs us sojourned thirty-eight years. *Deu 2:14 And the space in which we came from Kadeshbarnea, until we were come over the brook Zered, was thirty and eight years; until all the generation of the men of war were wasted out from among the host, as the LORD sware unto them.*

Their greatest provocation, the provocation in which they showed the greatest degree of evil disposition undoubtedly was their refusing to go into Canaan from Kadesh. It was therefore very properly termed the bitter provocation and the day of temptation.

God is exasperated by us when we call Him a liar and there are many who call upon the name of Christ who at the same time call His Father a liar! How you ask? When we use the word "cannot" (in the face of the word "I CAN do all things..."), when we attribute the events of this world to chance and tragedy (in the face of the glory of God), when we look at scripture and refuse to accept its truth for our age, when we look at nature and interpret it as some uncontrolled cosmic process (in the face of the Creator God), when we change the natural order and sanctify homosexuality (who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever) , in all these perversions we are calling God a liar and provoking Him!

There will be people doomed to wander the wilderness of eternity, Hell, who thought that they had found Christ but had merely been looking at their own reflection through life.

Exasperating God

Heb 3:10 So that I was angry with this generation, and I said, Their hearts are in error at all times, and they have no knowledge of my ways; And being angry I made an oath, saying, They may not come into my rest.

Continuing our analogy of parents and children we see here how God is exasperated by the errors of His children of Israel, error resulting from lack of knowledge of His ways. Does God however punish ignorance? Does God punish the heathen who do not hear the Gospel? The answer absolutely would appear, “yes” but not to the same degree. *Luk 12:48 But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.*

Does God punish His people who act in ignorance? The answer is no, because Christ bears the punishment and God has made provision for this ignorance in the sacrifice of Jesus. Before I prove that I would like to examine how God’s discipline works and how it is a model for parents.

God defines the boundaries of behaviour ahead of punishments and He gave the law at the beginning of the childhood of Israel whence He delivered the law of Commandments (Ex 20). He did not punish for example Sabbath breaking until the law had been given. *Hos 11:1 When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt. Rom 1:2 (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,).* We must make sure our rules or conventions are reasonable and explainable. Why do you think that we have a law about which side of the road to drive but not on which side of the pavement to walk? One of the worst things a parent can do is move the goal posts and on one occasion have a rule that is upheld on another occasion is dismissed.

God did not punish “accidents” or “blunders”. Perhaps this explains to some extent the words of Luke. *Luk 23:34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.* For example, He made provision for accidental killing. *Num 35:11 Then ye shall appoint you cities to be cities of refuge for you; that the slayer may flee thither, which killeth any person at unawares.*

Obviously, we cannot understand the mind of the Lord and some things that we think might be “good” are contrary to God’s will. *Isa 55:8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.* For example Peter’s protectiveness of Christ. *Mat 16:22 Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. Mat 16:23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.*

Within the Law of Moses there was sacrificial provision to atone for ignorance, hence my argument that the blood of Christ covers ignorance. *Lev 4:2 Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a soul shall sin through ignorance against any of the commandments of the LORD concerning things which*

ought not to be done, and shall do against any of them: Lev 4:3 If the priest that is anointed do sin according to the sin of the people; then let him bring for his sin, which he hath sinned, a young bullock without blemish unto the LORD for a sin offering. Num 15:22 And if ye have erred, and not observed all these commandments, which the LORD hath spoken unto Moses, Num 15:23 Even all that the LORD hath commanded you by the hand of Moses, from the day that the LORD commanded Moses, and henceforward among your generations; Num 15:24 Then it shall be, if ought be committed by ignorance without the knowledge of the congregation, that all the congregation shall offer one young bullock for a burnt offering, for a sweet savour unto the LORD, with his meat offering, and his drink offering, according to the manner, and one kid of the goats for a sin offering.

Distinguish between ignorance from willfulness. Children are prone to mistakes and forgetfulness, we might call it childish irresponsibility and that is part of growing up. Willful disobedience is openly going against the rules, as it were looking you in the eye and acting contrarily which requires sanction. *Pro 29:1 He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.*

There is clearly a justified anger when it is true that “I told you what to do”.

- **When challenged respond confidently and decisively.** God never gave in or felt guilty about His decisions because they were well thought out and well founded. He would not compromise His laws.
- **Teach after confrontation.** For example in Genesis 3, God gives the law, the law is broken and afterwards He teaches the consequences BUT makes provision for reconciliation.

The problem with the Children of Israel was that they didn't care what their Father said and they erred. The Greek word (πλανάομαι) translated error is where we derive the word planet. The planets appeared to the ancient observers to wander about the sky, unlike the stars fixed in their heavenly position. The Children of Israel wandered off because they did not have God's word in their heart unlike the Psalmist. *Psa 119:11 Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.*

Looking at this from a child's point of view surely it should be something that you should aspire to? Don't you think that you owe your parents something? Do you consider what they do for you? They provide warmth, clothing, food, home, education, gifts, comforts, education, transport, health care, protection, etc....

Is it unreasonable that you should not take them for granted? What would happen to you if your parents left you!

Comfort

Heb 3:13 But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

What does it mean to exhort? It comes from the Latin (exhortari; ex out + hortari to incite, encourage) and it says that we should make it a daily practice to encourage each other. The underlying word in the Greek (παρακαλεῖτε) is transliterated paraclete or comforter and is a term regularly applied to The Holy Spirit.

Joh 14:16 And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Joh 14:26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. Joh 16:7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

We often think of sympathy and empathy when we talk of comfort. The gentle hug and arm around the shoulder. Comfort though means to strengthen (F. *conforter*, L. *confortare* to strengthen much. *con-* + *fortis* strong) and this is at the root of exhortation. The believer in this aspect of his walk of faith is to imitate the work of The Holy Spirit.

We are to strengthen each other and this is spiritual training, spiritual weight lifting and spiritual gymnasium. The result will obviously be stronger Christians and that is the purpose of the ministry. It is to build up believers to be strong like Christ. *Eph 4:12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:* When Paul gave out a teaching he wanted his hearers to go away a bit stronger, more knowledgeable and better suited to sustain their faith in this world. *1Th 4:18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*

Now since it is here a commandment of God that we “comfort” one another, it is a Christian duty and must be a distinctive of the church of Christ. This gives us an idea of what should go on in church meetings. *1Co 14:23 If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?* Here then we may identify one of those criteria we should look for when choosing a place of worship. Not that we like the singing, the people are friendly, the preaching is entertaining (not that these should not be present) but rather when we come away we feel the spiritual equivalent of having been down the gym. We are mentally exercised, we have learned something, we are challenged, we are instructed, we are strengthened and we are comforted. *1Co 14:31 For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. Heb 3:13 But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

Now we see in the second part of our text the reason and benefit of exhortation. It is to deliver us from a heart hardened through sin. As in the natural so in the spiritual, exercising the soul leads to a healthy heart.

And do not overlook that word “daily”. I am sure that you do not eat only on Sunday so why limit your spiritual intake to Sunday? Yet there are many well fed Christians according to the flesh who are also spiritual skeletons, they feed so little on God’s word. We live in an age of easily accessible resources, more so than at any other time in History so we are without excuse if we say that we cannot find anything to read or study. How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?

So I will conclude by exhorting you to examine your daily spiritual habits and what you in your families do to comfort each other in Christ and so fulfil this verse in Hebrews.

Perseverance

Heb 3:14 For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end;

Did King Solomon make it to glory? We do not know for certain what happened in his last moments but what we do know is that when we last saw him he was behaving very badly. Did he persevere? In theology (especially in the phrase “final perseverance”) the word has come to denote a special persistency, the undying continuance of the new life (manifested in faith and holiness) given by the Spirit of God to man. It is questioned by some whether such imparted life is (by its nature, or by the law of its impartation) necessarily permanent, indestructible so that the once regenerate and believing man has the prospect of final glory infallibly assured. Once saved always saved?

But is not the scripture contradictory? Scripture on the one hand abounds with assurances of “perseverance” as a fact and largely intimates that an exulting anticipation of it is the intended experience of the believer. *Joh 10:28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.* *Rom 8:31 What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?* *Rom 8:32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?* *Rom 8:33 Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.* *Rom 8:34 Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.* *Rom 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?* *Rom 8:36 As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.* *Rom 8:37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.*

On the other hand we find frequent and urgent warnings and cautions. *1Co 9:27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.* *2Pe 1:10 Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:*

Meanwhile Scripture on the whole by the manner and weight of its positive statements, favours a humble belief of the permanence in the plan of God of the once-given new life. It is as if it laid down perseverance “as the divine rule” for the Christian while the negative passages came in to caution the man not to deceive himself with appearances or to let any belief whatever palliate the guilt and minimize the danger of sin. Perhaps when we read these verses, we should treat them as a “Self-Test” function.

Most electronic devices today have a self-test built in. It saves the manufacturer a lot of time diagnosing a possible problem in the system. I believe that there are self-tests built into the Christian faith, the “we knows” of scripture. *1Jn 5:2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.* We should make regular system health checks to assure ourselves that we are working correctly.

Upon the whole subject it is important as one observer has noted to make “the Perseverance of the Saviour” our watchword rather than “the Perseverance of the saint.”

Christian Proofs of Life 1

Heb 3:14 For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end;

What are the proofs of life for a Christian? What should we include in our spiritual health check? Firstly let us look at our FAITH. *Jas 2:14 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?*

Surely the scripture says, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved”, why then these works? *Joh 1:12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:*

What are good works? Good works are the application of our substance for the benefit of others and the furtherance of the Gospel. “If a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food” should we not be involved in any charitable works? Is it a good enough excuse to say that in my society I cannot find any works to do because the State has undertaken them all? *1Ti 5:9 Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, 1Ti 5:10 Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work. 1Ti 6:7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. 1Ti 6:8 And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. 1Ti 6:9 But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. 1Ti 6:10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*

Christ in us illuminates our works to the world. *Mat 5:14 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Mat 5:15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Mat 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.* Or to put it another way if you want people to see Christ in you, then let them see your works, works are a mirror of Christ reflecting His glory. Works are the best witness!

Joh 9:5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. He has now given us to be that light which shines not just through preaching but through good works. To be honest, I see very little of this today because we generally hire others to do it for us. In churches, collections go towards buildings rather than people and we are prepared to let others steward our gifts. It is after all much easier than being involved ourselves. Good works must also flow from a good heart otherwise they are just works. That is what puts the “GOOD” into works. The world’s children appear to do good works but in truth they are only works. They are like a piece of lead plated with gold on the outside, they look good but they are not solid gold all the way through.

If you are not producing any good works or to check if your works are just gold plated, check if the following apply to your walk:

- I never thought about it
- I am not prepared to give any time to it
- I am too busy with other things
- I am not interested and I would rather do other things
- I cannot find anything to support
- I find it hard to be generous, giving is not easy

These are all issues of the heart that need to be changed before we can truly work as God intended. You see the works are there for us to do. *Eph 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.* Those works cannot flow from moral indifference, covetousness and selfishness. If they do they are not good. Unblock the fountain and the water will flow. We cannot walk in them when we refuse to walk! Paul does not write that we are “created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has ordained to come to pass” or that “God will do in spite of us”. We MUST walk in them.

Jesus never asked you to be great theologians but He did ask you to SHINE before men. *Tit 2:14 Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*

Christian Proofs of Life 2

Heb 3:14 For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end;

2Pe 1:4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. Do your best to improve your faith. You can do this by adding goodness, understanding, self-control, patience, devotion to God, concern for others and love. If you keep growing in this way, it will show that what you know about our Lord Jesus Christ has made your life useful and meaningful.

Many Christians stagnate because they become dependent upon a church group or pastor to supply their growth hormone. Here we are told it is a personal duty not the duty of others. **Do your best!** If Christians put half of the effort into this personal development as they do into career development or leisure activities they would be a force to be reckoned with.

What is actually happening today is that churches are compromising faith and adopting the world's easy standards and language. For example the chorus:

Great, great, brill, brill, Wicked, wicked, skill, skill, To have a friend like Jesus.

A proof of life is self-improvement that is, a conscious effort to change from what we were to what we should be. Along that path we counter opposition. The devil is always offering us alternative solutions. Satan's temptations are subtle. When we look at the temptations of Christ they are "helpful". "I will help you get food", "I will help you show your power", "and I will help you get a kingdom". *Mat 4:1 Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. Mat 4:2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. Mat 4:3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. Mat 4:4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Mat 4:5 Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the Temple, Mat 4:6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Mat 4:7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Mat 4:8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; Mat 4:9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Mat 4:10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Mat 4:11 Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.*

When we are confronted with the difficulties of life we should pull back and ask ourselves where we are drawing our help and solutions from? Am I being encouraged to become something other than Christ intended by following the help of others? Salvation is worked out on your own and as some translations put it "continue to work out" your own salvation. *Php 2:12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*

Being in the world is fraught with danger because there are many voices that encourage us to follow other paths. When we encounter problems, "tribulations", we may take a path that seems to lead to a solution but miss the point that "trouble" is part of the process.

Rom 5:3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patienceRom 5:3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. Drawing down from God is the solution. Gal 5:22 but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Gal 5:22 but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

Christians will want to grow because they are part of the family but growth doesn't just come by sticking your head in the sand it comes from being in the world and putting that experience to good use. *Joh 17:15 I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.*

The qualities that we see here before us are what I would call the "niceness" of Christianity. The soft side of the Divinity.

Christian Proofs of Life 3

Heb 3:14 For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end;

Lets us look at the “We Knows” of John’s epistles. Christians have the answers to life’s issues and their confidence is one of the things that marks them out as believers. This however is not an individual belief it is the corporate belief of the Church of Christ. We all who call ourselves Christians believe these things. These are the 11 certainties of the faith and those not in possession of them are either deficient or not in the faith at all.

1. *1Jn 2:3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.* The knowledge of God flows from obedience. Disobedient people are deficient in the knowledge of God.
2. *Jn 2:18 Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.* Eschatology. We are convinced that the end is near because we recognize the antichrists. We look forward to the end because we are not at home in this life.
3. *1Jn 3:2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.* We shall not be deceived by antichrists but will recognize Jesus and be like Him when He appears.
4. *1Jn 3:14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.* The proof of being in our new family is that we do not regard ourselves as part of our old family, the world. Where are your loyalties, who is your mother, father and brother?
5. *1Jn 3:19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.* Practical love proves the truth in us. *1Jn 3:18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.*
6. *1Jn 3:24 And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.* God has given us a new Spirit, a new life and new allegiances. *Rom 8:15 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.*
7. *1Jn 5:2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.* A disobedient person is not a loving person in God’s eyes. Make no mistake! Let nothing pass for love where that proceeds from disobedience.

8. *1Jn 5:15 And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.* Prayer is not a wasted exercise. Prayer is not hopeful it is certain because we understand HIS will.
9. *1Jn 5:18 We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.* Sin is despicable to us even though we fail and fall into it. Like David we live in Christ and "Sin not".
10. *1Jn 5:19 And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.* We are polarized in our life and thinking. Could it be otherwise?
11. *1Jn 5:20 And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.* We know the living Christ. Christianity is no hope it is a certain fact of life.

Unbelief

Heb 3:15 While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. Heb 3:16 for some when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. Heb 3:17 But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcases fell in the wilderness? Heb 3:18 And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? Heb 3:19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

Unbelief is a human condition that disables our spiritual capability. *Mat 13:58 And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief. Mar 6:6 And he marvelled because of their unbelief. And he went round about the villages, teaching. Mat 17:20 And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.*

The greatness of faith often can be measured by the obstacles it overcomes. For the mustard seed, it begins life as the least of all seeds but it is not size that counts in God's eyes, it is persistence. Jesus did not illustrate the power of faith by comparison with an Elephant or Lion, large strong creatures. He almost goes out of His way to find the weakest and most insignificant creation to make His point. In doing so He makes it accessible to us all, because we are not all strong and powerful like lions but we can relate to a mustard seed above which we tower as giants.

The father of the demon possessed child came to Jesus in desperation. *Mar 9:17 And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; Mar 9:18 And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not. Mar 9:19 He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me.*

The father was in tears as he fought to summon up the faith to deliver his son. He believed but there were doubts in his mind, a dark area of unbelief. He did not want this unbelief but how to remove it? “Help my unbelief” he asks the Master. What must have dawned on Him was that the limitations of his faith were overcome by looking at Christ, for without Christ he could do nothing. *Joh 15:15 Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.*

If ever there was a man with swings of temperament it was Simon Peter. He tries hard to please Jesus but on so many occasions gets it wrong but he is always the first to come forward when summoned. In the dawn light of a raging storm, he sees Jesus walking on the waters calling him to join him. *Mat 14:26 And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. Mat 14:27 But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. Mat 14:28 And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. Mat 14:29 And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. Mat 14:30 But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.*

What folly! How can a man walk on water? But Peter as ever bold, gets over the side of the boat onto the boiling sea. It must have been an experience like walking on a bouncy castle! As the reality of his predicament dawns, fear grows in his mind and with fear, faith departs and Peter slowly sinks beneath the waves. He cries for help and help is immediately at hand. Jesus who was a few moments ago at a distance is immediately by His side holding His hand. Walking back to the boat Jesus observes that Peter has “small faith” but it was enough when Jesus was present. It is not a rebuke to Peter but an observation and Peter has that mustard seed. It needs to grow.

Abraham is set as an example of faith over unbelief. *Rom 4:20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;* The scripture records that he did not “stagger” through unbelief. The word in the Greek for stagger means to discern or make a judgment about the matter. I think it means that he did not let his human reasoning affect or sway his knowledge of his God. He didn’t take into the equation his old age or his wife’s infertility. He knew by now that when God makes a promise He keeps it.

The Israelites in the wilderness never latched on to the fact that with God on their side they were successful. They spent their time looking backwards and complaining, doubting and disobeying. The lesson is clear. What is impossible with man is possible with God. We have no reason to doubt Him and we shall be certain of our entry into His kingdom.

Fear

Heb 4:1 Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. Heb 4:2 For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

Be afraid! Fear can be a healthy sign. Fear is defined in Webster's dictionary as, "an unpleasant, sometimes strong emotion caused by an anticipation or awareness of danger" or "anxious concern". Fear affects both the physiology of the body and the chemical balance of the brain as well. Fear can paralyse into inactivity but also when people are afraid it generates stress and that can be a life saver because it can move us to action. *Mat 13:15 For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.*

Psa 19:9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

But what are we to fear? We are to be afraid that we do not enter into the "rest" that God has enjoyed since creation. *Gen 2:2 And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.*

For the Jews the "rest" was of entering into the land of Promise, a land flowing with milk and honey, a land where all of the enemies would be conquered and they could all live in peace. It was also remembered weekly as the Sabbath. *Exo 20:11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.*

What the Bible is showing us in the Older Testament, is a picture of the trials and troubles of faith. This is exactly the same for the Christian. We are on our journey out of Egypt (the world) into Canaan (heaven).

As we know, there are only two places in the afterlife, heaven and hell. Consider the prospect of rest as contrast against the constant unrest of hell. For centuries artists have tried to portray the conditions of the two places. Hell shows the ugliness of humanity, people tortured and torturing one another. Unrest and discomfort characterise the place. In his triptych, Hieronymus Bosch paints the Garden of Earthly delights and it is little different from his image of hell. It is slightly lighter but with similar content. It would appear that evil and sin do not cease in hell, they are more unrestrained.

There is a sense in which this present life is a foretaste of hell. What happened to those at Siloam when the tower killed them would happen to all men who didn't repent. *Luk 13:1 There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. Luk 13:2 And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? Luk 13:3 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Luk 13:4 Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? Luk 13:5 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*

If in the Old Testament, paradise regained was illustrated in the Promised Land by milk and honey flowing in abundance, then hell was shown in the punishments for disobedience. Evil was quarantined.

The famous rubbish tip outside of Jerusalem was used by Jesus as an analogy of hell. *Mat 5:22 But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Mat 5:30 And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.*

According to Thayer, Hell is the place of the future punishment called “Gehenna” or “Gehenna of fire”. This was originally the valley of Hinnom south of Jerusalem, where the filth and dead animals of the city were cast out and burned; a fit symbol of the wicked and their future destruction.

The prospect of hell should be enough to make us fearful of missing out on the prospect of rest. Fear now is better than eternal fear in hell.

Sabbath Rest 1

The failure to observe the Sabbath invoked the death penalty. *Exo 31:15 Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD: whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death.* If you didn't rest then you were made to rest....you died! One day a man went out to gather firewood and was caught and condemned and stoned to death. *Num 15:32 And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day. Num 15:33 And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation. Num 15:34 And they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him. Num 15:35 And the LORD said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp. Num 15:36 And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the LORD commanded Moses.*

In the New Testament we appear to have a rule change that gives us an option of Sabbath observance. *Col 2:16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:* It is no longer a matter of judgement, by which I take it that you could not be condemned if you did not observe the day.

What if you should choose to observe it? That is not a problem. *Rom 14:6 He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.* Personal freedom is acceptable but you have no right to impose your freedom upon others. It is not a general rule for the church that we must observe a weekly Sabbath.

Why then was the Sabbath such an issue with God in the Old Testament? Why wasn't it an option like it is now? Surely, like the law on divorce it should be tightened up not relaxed? *Mat 19:9 And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.*

It is of note that neither the law on Divorce nor the law on the Sabbath were codified before the Exodus. As far as scripture goes they are not mentioned until the law is given to the Nation at Sinai.

Exo 20:8 Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Deu 24:1 When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. Deu 24:2 And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife. Deu 24:3 And if the latter husband hate her, and write her a bill of divorcement, and giveth it in her hand, and sendeth her out of his house; or if the latter husband die, which took her to be his wife; Deu 24:4 Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.

What was the status of marriage before the law giving? Marriage existed after creation and this is the true form of marriage. *Mat 19:4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female.*

Sabbath existed in its truest form as the rest of God. *Gen 2:2 And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.* God neither invited man to participate in His Sabbath nor did He institutionalise it until the Exodus when it becomes a national institution.

What was God's rest and how did He rest? We might find the answer where we are told the Sabbath (rest) is a shadow but the body, the substance is Christ. *Col 1:17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.* God rested in Christ! By this I understand that He rested in the work and accomplishments of Christ. Christ who is the wisdom and designer of God's Universe is the focus of God's accomplishments and the One in whom God rests.

He rests his creation, redemption and righteousness in the person of Christ. That is where we too must rest. When we enter into that rest, rest in the person and works of Jesus, God can truly love us. Many people today think that God loves you irrespective of your attitude. That is a lie. God will only love you if you love His only begotten Son Jesus. *Joh 16:27 For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.*

We might see in the weekly Sabbath a concession to the hardness of man's heart. The weekly Sabbath was only one day in seven, indicative that men could not fully enter into the totality of God's rest. Their obedience was a token of their willingness to be fully in the presence of God but they could not at that time fully enter into it.

God's wrath expressed to the Sabbath breaker in that age was anger against the attitude to Christ. Men who continued their own works were men unworthy of God's rest. They would die. The same is true now. If men do not hold to the faith of God they must be holding to their own works and they will never enter into God's rest. By this we see the answer to our question, surely the law on Sabbath should be tightened up? Well it has been and the penalty is not death it is eternal death.

Sabbath Rest 2

Heb 4:9 There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God AV. Heb 4:9 There remains then a sabbatism to the people of God. (J N Darby)

By 1844 William Miller, a Baptist pastor in Portland, USA, had convinced himself and his congregation that the Lord was on His way and the second advent was imminent. They gave away their possessions and on the day sat on a mountain waiting for the sun to rise on the new age on the 21st March.

When Christ did not come a group of these disappointed Adventists (Millerites) continued their Bible studies and concluded that they had misinterpreted prophetic events and that the second coming of Christ was still in the future. This same group of Adventists later accepted the teaching of the seventh-day Sabbath and became known as Seventh-day Adventists.

Ellen G Harmon was 17 years of age when this happened and a member of Miller's congregation. Later she married James White and early in their marriage having studied a tract published by Joseph Bates, in New Bedford, Massachusetts, entitled *Seventh-day Sabbath*, claiming to set forth the Biblical evidence for the sacredness of the seventh day. They became convinced that the views set forth were scriptural and they began to keep Saturday as the Sabbath. Some six months later, on April 3, 1847, Ellen White was shown in vision the law of God in the heavenly sanctuary, with a halo of light around the fourth commandment.

Here lies a great danger. The scriptures were being supplemented by visions that contradicted the apostle's doctrine. In fact this seems to have been a feature of the times in America, in the early 1800's, which also saw the development of the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, two huge heretical sects.

The scripture here is clear that the Sabbath for us is in the future, when our work here on earth is done. Here is an activity that we should engage in, that is, using diligence to enter into that rest. *Heb 4:11 Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.*

Our studies, our devotions and our lives should have that single focus. All else in life must be subservient to this great task placed upon us. While it is important to work for things in this life to support our needs and our families, it is not an end in itself.

Mat 16:26 For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Looking to that future on the other side of the grave is not a morbid subject. It is one of great delight and one we should eagerly anticipate because it holds those things we so much desire and see so little of here.

Rev 21:4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

The Word of God 1

Heb 4:12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

We have to ask ourselves just what is meant by the “Word of God”. If you were to ask many Christians today what it is they would probably reply, “The Bible”. We must however remind ourselves that the Bible as we know it did not exist in the New Testament, because Paul and the other apostles were still writing it. What we know as the Bible was only put together from sacred sources hundreds of years later.

In the Older Testament the word of God could refer to the inspiration received by a prophet. *1Ki 12:22 But the word of God came unto Shemaiah the man of God, saying, 1Ch 17:3 And it came to pass the same night, that the word of God came to Nathan, saying, Luk 3:2 Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.*

It would appear that the Spirit of God would tell the prophet what to say and that utterance would be the word of God.

The word of God might also be a personal message and as such does not have general application. *1Sa 9:27 And as they were going down to the end of the city, Samuel said to Saul, Bid the servant pass on before us, (and he passed on,) but stand thou still a while, that I may shew thee the word of God.*

What God gave to Saul was not given to you and me. When we read the scripture we must discern not simply the content but also who it is talking to. “Flip plop” Christians take the whole Bible to speak to them personally and so open it and plant their finger on a page for a message from God. There is an apocryphal story of a man who indulged in this hit upon two verses and this serves to show the folly of such a practice. He flicked through his Bible and landed on the following: *Mat 27:5 And he cast down the pieces of silver in the Temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. Luk 10:37 And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.*

The association of the written scriptures with the word of God is taught by Jesus. *Luk 4:4 And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God. Mar 7:13 Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye..... Joh 10:35 If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken;*

The words of Jesus are quotes from the ancient scrolls of Deuteronomy and so we have another sense of meaning for the word of God. *Deu 8:3 And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth*

of the LORD doth man live.

We may also see the word of God as preaching and indeed the product of preaching is also called the word of God. *Luk 5:1 And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, Act 13:44 And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. Act 6:7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.*

There is however the Word of God in its highest meaning.

Rev 19:13 And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. Christ is the eternal Word of God. Joh 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

What does this mean? It means that as words flow from the mouth all that God says and is, all that proceeds from the Father may be seen in the Son, Jesus. Such that “He that has seen me (Jesus) has seen the Father”. *Joh 14:9 Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father*

We might then summarise that the word of God is:

- Divine utterances and the speech of a prophet
- The history and utterances of God in dealing with His people
- The recording of God’s words spoken by men
- The preaching of God’s word
- The growth of the church associated with preaching
- Christ Himself.

We shall see what the effects of these are!

The Word of God 2

Heb 4:12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

The gladius was the main weapon for the Roman soldier when he got into close quarter fighting. This was a sword which was kept razor sharp. Anyone on the receiving end of a blow from a gladius would suffer severe injuries.

The sharper the sword the less painful the cut. Some years ago I was working on a drawing board with a scalpel. The instrument slid off of the board and fell on my leg. I didn’t feel a thing but suddenly there was a huge and growing pool of blood and a deep cut to mark the spot. God’s word

can be like a scalpel if used professionally but unfortunately many Christians use it as a club and do more harm than good.

A sharp sword requires regular handling if it is to have any effect. The sword of the word is described as:

- Quick (Greek zao lively).
- Powerful (Greek energeis active).
- Sharper (Greek temno to cut).
- Piercing (Greek diikneomai penetrating) .
- Dividing (Greek Merismos separating) , Soul and spirit (Psyche and Pneuma), Joints and marrow
- Discerner (Greek kritikos discriminates), of thoughts deliberations and Intent.

We use an expression to describe the effect when someone has made a point that hits home. We say that they have been cut to the quick. God's word handled well can make an impact on the soul of man and there are examples of this in the New Testament.

Act 5:33 When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them..... Act 7:54 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.

Handled well, the word of God will convict but not necessarily convert a man and it is this very important role, upholding the truth that is a prime use of it in Scripture. *Eph 5:11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. 2Ti 4:2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.*

There is also one thing that we tend to forget when we use this sword and that is that it has two edges. When we apply one edge of the sword to another person, there is another edge pointing at us. It should remind us that we should have applied the edge to ourselves before we apply it to others.

Mat 7:2 For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

I would say that one of the things that the world picks up on is the hypocrisy of so called Christianity. Christians are portrayed as Bible bashers with double standards. Don't do what I do, do what I say. Jesus had them to deal with in his own day. *Luk 13:14 And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day.*

Also we must be very careful to distinguish what is the word of God and what is not. There are many issues in life that are not immediately covered the word of God and reside in the area of conscience. Before we are critical of others let us make quite certain that our criticisms are not based on personal prejudices, preferences and likes and dislikes.

Yes, I know that the world would be a better place if everyone was like me, but if it were, I would be God!

Nowhere to Hide

Heb 4:13 Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

There is nowhere to hide from God. He is everywhere, an attribute we call Omnipotence or all knowing. *Pro 15:3 The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.* All our thought processes are accessible as if God has somehow permanent access to the computer in our heads. Our good and evil thoughts are before Him and even if we would deceive ourselves, He is never taken in by us. *Psa 139:8 If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.*

“The veil of night is no disguise,
No screen from thy all-searching eyes;
Thy hands can seize thy foes as soon.
Thro’ midnight shades as blazing noon.”

Isaac Watts.

When Adam sinned he had a sense of God’s presence even though God had not appeared before him but God was looking into Adam and Adam felt stripped and in need of something to prevent God’s gaze. *Gen 3:7 And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed Gen 3:10 And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.* Perhaps also Adam was conscious of God’s eyes looking into his reproductive organs at the generations who would suffer as result of this sin. So he covered his genitals. Could Adam hide his nakedness? Not effectively.

This ability to see into the mind of man was also in Jesus which shows that He too was Omniscient. *Luk 5:22 But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts?* I imagine that this was one of the things that most worried His hearers, that He knew all about them. How would you handle such knowledge? Would you use it for good to help people?

I imagine that we would become very anxious if we knew what people were thinking about us. It might help or hinder many of our attitudes and harm many a friendship. But it took a Divine mind to handle it and it was never abused to belittle people. Had Christ continually used this ability openly to point out man’s failings He would have left a trail of desperation and despair among mankind but He didn’t. He lets His Spirit work kindly in our lives to allow us time for reflection and repentance. He gives us comfort in the knowledge that however bad we have been, that it can be remedied and obliterated from the mind of God.

God not only sees into our minds, He has a huge memory bank into which He records all of our actions and thoughts, in Bible times called a “Book”. *Rev 20:12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their*

works.

But for His people there is no judgement only forgiveness. *Rom 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Jer 31:34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.* How magnificent and gracious is the working of our God that He can do this.

But let us not forget this verse in its context of the sharp word of God. It is God whose word is thus powerful and it is God in whose sight every creature is manifest and of this his word, working on the conscience gives the fullest conviction. But all things are naked and opened –Greek τετραχηλισμένα - possibly alluding to the sacrifices under the law which were first flayed, and then (as the Greek word literally means) cleft asunder through the neck and backbone; so that everything both without and within was exposed to open view.

We can apply the sword to ourselves now or God will do it later.

Our High Priest 1

Heb 4:14 Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.

For we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

We have a High Priest so why do we need priests who are men? Why should we call a man father? *Mat 23:9 And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.*

This was one of the great truths of the Reformation when men were breaking the power of the institutional churches that they did not need a human hierarchy or human intermediary, they could go straight to their God.

And it is not a God who does not know what it is like to be infirm, weak or frail as we are because he was tested just as we are. He is a sympathetic (Greek συμπαθησαί) God. The question is can we draw upon this sympathy or do we give up in despair because we do not believe that Jesus went through the sufferings we go through?

How could He have suffered the things we suffer? Remember we have seen that Jesus knew the heart of man. How many times then did he experience in others the sorrow of bereavement, the despair of poverty, the dark fear and uncertainty of the blind, the isolation of the leper, the loneliness of the widow, the pain of the sick? Are we to believe when he saw the widow of Nain taking her son to the grave, He felt and knew nothing of her suffering? *Luk 7:13 And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. No He yearned for her!*

The hymn writer noted this as a privilege of Christians. Irishman Joseph Scriven was born in 1819 and graduated from Trinity College, Dublin. Things seemed to be going well in his life. He fell in love with a young woman and they planned to marry. But tragedy struck. The evening before the wedding his bride drowned. Joseph moved to a teaching post in Port Hope in Canada but sadness followed him. He again became engaged but once more, just before the wedding his bride became ill and died. In 1855 his mother in Ireland also became ill and to encourage her, he wrote the following poem:

What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and grief's to bear.
What a privilege to carry, everything to God in Prayer.
O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry, everything to God in Prayer.

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful, who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge, take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? take it to the Lord in prayer;
in his arms He'll take and shield thee, thou wilt find a solace there.

Such words would be easy for Mr. Scriven to write; he knew sorrow and pain. His whole life had been devoted to caring for the sick and needy. But in the end it all became too much for him and his spirit and finances went into steep decline. Late one night, 10th August 1886, poor Joseph Scriven was deeply depressed. He was left alone whilst a friend stayed in an adjoining room. Later when the friend went to check Joseph was all right he was surprised to see the room empty. A search was made but it wasn't until the middle of the next day Joseph's body was found, lying in some water. To this day we do not know if his death was an accident or suicide.

Did that poor man really know the power of what he wrote? We shall only know in glory when we seek him out and find him fully comforted. Some have weathered the storms of this life and survived because they found the sympathetic Jesus.

Our High Priest 2

Heb 4:14 Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. Heb 4:15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Heb 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

We said last week that Jesus through His omniscience would have had a great wealth of experience of personal sorrow. In fact His earthly ministry was in a manner of speaking the apprenticeship or

shop floor experience of life. When we look at the ministry of Jesus we see that there were two components. Teaching and healing.

Mat 4:23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.

Jesus ministry was all about human interaction and interpersonal relationships. It was not about separation from the world (monastic) or high level involvement in the politics of kings. It was about people and it is this that gives me the confidence that He will do as he says and care for me. The French version puts it nicely that Jesus is a “sympathiser à nos infirmités”.

If you look at the training for the Christian ministry, it is not academic. The ability to minister is a gift of grace so that Paul could say he was “made” a minister. *Eph 3:7 Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Col 1:23 If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister;*

That of course requires Bible knowledge but what actually certifies a man is that he has been through the school of life as Jesus had (I Timothy 3).

The younger ones may ask “but how does Jesus understand me and why should He care?” Well he was a child Himself but even as a man He had special care for children. *Mat 19:14 But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven* He is the High Priest of Children.

Father-like he tends and spares us;
well our feeble frame he knows;
in his hands he gently bears us,
rescues us from all our foes:

The sisters might ask the question, “well it’s all right for you men but how can Jesus possibly know what women feel?” Well you will notice that Jesus had many women disciples who ministered to Him and that they were the ones who cared for Him in life and Death. From the high born to the fallen, He knew and sympathized with them.

This is especially so with the woman who had the issue of blood. *Mar 5:25 And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years, Mar 5:26 And had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse, Mar 5:27 When she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment. Mar 5:28 For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole.* She drew on the power of Jesus. She took something from Jesus and He knew exactly what her condition was to prompt this action.

In this example we begin to see how we might approach our High Priest. The woman drew power from Christ. The Bible teaches us that we too can draw power. *1Co 4:20 For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.*

I would say that as Christians we seldom look for the power of God in our lives. We tend to use our knowledge and personalities far more than is good for us. We must note in the example of the sick woman that she had exhausted herself. It is perhaps only when we are emptied of self and put self in the background that we can truly access this power. *2Co 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.*

Becoming Our High Priest

Heb 4:16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. There is a conclusion to these verses in our text. Therefore, as a result of our argument, Let us come boldly.

There were two occasions when Jesus wept, one was at Lazarus' tomb, and the other was in Jerusalem, the week before the crucifixion. These illustrations show Christ's compassion tears for the one; tears for the twice ten thousand. *Joh 11:35 Jesus wept. Luk 19:41 And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it,*

Never was there a compassion so discriminative and never a compassion so inclusive. Our separate sorrows, He understands them all. Our hours of solitary anguish by the grave and not less the problem of the crowd around us. There are men who are full of sympathy for personal sorrows but have never heard the crying of the multitude. There are men who hear the crying of the multitude but have never been broken-hearted at the grave. Christ has room for all and room for each. He loves the world with a divine compassion. And yet there is no one here who cannot say, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me."

In the Old Testament there was a brass statue called Nehushtan. It was made by Moses after God had punished the Israelites for moaning and ingratitude. *Num 21:5 And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. Num 21:6 And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. Num 21:7 Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. Num 21:8 And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. Num 21:9 And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.*

Snakes entered the camp and many people died and many suffered agony from the bites. It reminds us that the devil is often portrayed as a serpent or snake and from the beginning he was out to kill mankind. The brass serpent was set up in the camp and those who went and looked at it were made well. It is like the work of Jesus. Death lifted up so that death could be destroyed. You will note in this story that all the people had to do was LOOK.

Isa 45:22 Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.

There was no work, no bringing something to appease God, no penance, it had all been done and you looked upon the work of another. Neither could you send someone else along to do the looking for you, you had to drag yourself to this cross of brass. This symbol of the snake on a pole (the Aesculapian snake) has become the symbol of healing around the world.



Having looked upon the work of Christ and knowing that we have been delivered from the power of that old serpent, we can at all times and especially in time of need find help. *Rev 20:2 And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,* The word for help is interesting, as it is a sailors term. It is used for binding a vessel to a post. So there is in the word “help” the idea of stabilising and securing us from uncertainties and troubles in life.

God never intended that Christianity would be a soft ride. If He did then verses such as our text today should not be in the Bible. There are and will be many times when we will NEED to come boldly to the throne of Grace. We should never feel unworthy either, because coming to the throne has nothing to do with our worthiness. It is about Christ’s worthiness. He invites the unworthy to go boldly where no sinful man can go.

Why Do We Need a High Priest?

Heb 5:1 For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: Heb 5:2 Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.

Why do we need a High Priest if we have been forgiven of our sins, surely the need for a priest indicates that we still have sin in our lives? Both are true. *Joh 1:7 The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. Joh 1:8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. Joh 1:9 That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. Joh 1:10 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. Joh 1:11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not. Joh 1:12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Joh 1:13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

In Pilgrim’s Progress by John Bunyan, Christian starts his journey from the City of Destruction, with a burden on his back that he finally loses at the Cross. His journey to the Celestial City has not finished and he must climb the hill called Difficulty and pass through the valley of Humiliation.

You see while we have been forgiven and forensically justified, the world has not been forgiven. It is a filthy place where its dirt rubs off on us. We need regular washing or as we know it in scripture,

SANCTIFICATION. This is clearly illustrated in the events of the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). Yom Kippur as the Israelites would have known it was a religious spring-cleaning day.

The day started with a ritual dressing of the High Priest. *Lev 16:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they offered before the LORD, and died; Lev 16:2 And the LORD said unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the vail before the mercy seat, which is upon the ark; that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat. Lev 16:3 Thus shall Aaron come into the holy place: with a young bullock for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering. Lev 16:4 He shall put on the holy linen coat, and he shall have the linen breeches upon his flesh, and shall be girded with a linen girdle, and with the linen mitre shall he be attired: these are holy garments; therefore shall he wash his flesh in water, and so put them on.*

This was followed by sacrifices. *Lev 16:5 And he shall take of the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering.*

He then entered into the Tabernacle burning incense. *Lev 16:12 And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the LORD, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the vail: Lev 16:13 And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not:*

He was making an “At-One-Ment” for the Holy place because it had been corrupted by the sins of the Israelites. *Lev 16:16 And he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins: and so shall he do for the Tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness. Lev 16:17 And there shall be no man in the Tabernacle of the congregation when he goeth in to make an atonement in the holy place, until he come out, and have made an atonement for himself, and for his household, and for all the congregation of Israel. Lev 16:18 And he shall go out unto the altar that is before the LORD, and make an atonement for it; and shall take of the blood of the bullock, and of the blood of the goat, and put it upon the horns of the altar round about. The dirt of man had polluted the Holy things.*

Often Christians feel a failure because they are burdened about the sins that so easily beset us. *Heb 12:2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

I think that that awareness of sin is a sign of a healthy life. It is not a life that lives in a fantasy world of incipient perfectionism and holier than thou perfectionism. Those lives never understood the depths of sin in the human heart or as theologians have termed it, the total Depravity of the soul.

There is a constant need for an intermediary, someone who has been given access to God because we ourselves cannot enter His presence alone. You may remember that the two sons of Aaron (Lev 10) tried to go into God’s presence on their own terms and were killed. No man takes the honour of High Priest for himself. *Heb 5:4 And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of*

God, as was Aaron.

So Christ was made a High Priest for us. *Heb 5:5 So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee.*

I point out that the “begetting” does not refer to the incarnation of Christ in Mary; it refers to the raising of Jesus from the dead. *Act 13:33 God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.* This answers our question as to when Jesus became a High Priest; it was after the sacrifice on the cross.

We shall explore the role of the High Priest further in Hebrews chapter 8 and 9 but for now we see that such a one is necessary for our sanctification.

Being Heard

Heb 5:5 So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee. Heb 5:6 As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. Heb 5:7 Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared;

The circumstances refer to what is often called the “agony in the garden”. *Mat 26:39 And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.*

Such was his piety that the primary desire was “heard,” though it was not literally answered. We learn here that a prayer may be “heard” and yet not answered; it may be acceptable to God, though it may not consist with his arrangements to bestow the very blessing that is sought. The posture of the mind of the Redeemer perhaps was something like this. He knew that He was about to be put to death in a most cruel manner but a death magnified by the number of humanity. *Heb 2:9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.* It is as it were the death of a million deaths. His tender and sensitive nature as a man shrank from such a death. As a man He went under the pressure of his great sorrows and pleaded that the cup might be removed and that man might be redeemed by a less fearful scene of suffering.

That prayer offered in faith may not always be “literally answered.” No one can doubt that Jesus offered the prayer of faith, if He referred in the prayer to the death on the cross, that it was not “literally” answered, for He submitted to the Fathers will. *Mat 26:39 And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.* It may occur now that prayer shall be offered with every right feeling and with an earnest desire for the object, which may not be literally answered.

One thing we can say is that God did not disregard the prayer.... "and was heard". Christ submitted His will to the will of God, "not as I will but as You will" and so carried the purpose through.

Christians even in the highest exercise of faith are not inspired to know what is best for them and as long as this is the case, it is possible that they may ask for things which it would not be best to have granted. Those who maintain that the prayer of faith is always literally answered must hold that the Christian is under such a guidance of the Spirit of God that he cannot ask anything amiss but this is not always so. We are often in the dark night of prayer when we cannot see the purpose of God.

2Co 12:8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. 2Co 12:9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Paul was content to live with the outcome because God answered the prayer after a different fashion. He could not live with the suffering so God empowered him to do so through His grace. The act of prayer had itself revealed the will of God. Unanswered prayer does not mean that God does not listen to us or that we are out of fellowship.

Zep 3:17 The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing. Zep 3:17 The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.

The Order of Mechisedec

Heb 5:6 As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

What does the name mean? (King of Righteousness King of Peace = מלך צדק מלך שלם). The story of the King Melchizedek, a Priest King, informs us that true religion, the worship of the true God was not limited to any particular tribe or family. Religion was not confined to a nation such as Israel.

After the flood we see that it wasn't just animals that survived the flood. *Gen 8:20 And Noah builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.* Religion had also survived. We should also remember that at the time of Abraham Noah's son Shem was still alive and Noah had only just died. Probably men did not need to keep detailed records because they had living Bibles. If you wanted to know about the flood you could have asked Noah himself.

Job was also one of those descendants who had kept the faith. The country he lived in was the land of Uz, in the eastern part of Arabia, which lay towards Chaldea, near Euphrates, probably not far from Ur of the Chaldees, where Abraham lived. Job was also a priest. *Job 1:5 And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually. Job 1:5 And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose*

up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually. Abraham too performed the duties of a priest. Gen 22:2 *And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.*

So it is not surprising that we see other brothers in the faith at the time of Abraham and this one lived in Salem or Jerusalem. Psa 76:2 *In Salem also is his Tabernacle, and his dwelling place in Zion.* What had inspired a King to come and visit an ordinary man? Why would a King get out of bed for this? Why hadn't Melchizedek supported Abraham or was he on his way to do so?

As we shall see, from this one meeting and from these few verses a whole doctrine is developed in the Book of Hebrews (Chapters 5, 6 and 7). In the verse before us we see that Jesus is a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Why is this important?

It is important because as we shall see it puts the priesthood of Christ apart from the Levitical priests. In one sense it shows that Christ's priesthood is not Jewish/Israel but gentile. The argument that is developed in Hebrews also makes the priesthood of Melchizedek superior to the Levitical priesthood.

The meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek was the meeting between two priests but Abraham; whose descendants became the Levitical priests was inferior to Melchizedek. Heb 7:7 *And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better.*

Another interesting observation for the moment is that Melchizedek gave a blessing with the elements of Bread and Wine, the two symbols of the Body and Blood of Jesus.

Suffering

Heb 5:8 Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;

We accept that Christ is God and we understand that God knows everything. Job 21:22 *Shall any teach God knowledge?* How then is it possible for God to learn anything since He knows it all? Further, how could we ever doubt Christ's obedience? Joh 8:29 *And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him.* Perhaps what we have here is written more for our comfort than for our understanding. I could for example describe to you places that I have been but actually being in those places yourself and hearing, smelling, tasting and seeing the sights for yourself is a different matter. There is a difference between sampling information and learning from your own senses and experience.

Abraham could be told about sacrifice and see others make sacrifice but it was a different matter to be involved at the personal level within his own sphere of existence. Gen 22:2 *And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.*

It would be a painless Christianity if we could learn the lessons of God vicariously, that is, from someone else without having to go through the process. But the process is according to our verses, as important as the personal experience of the event. The two go together.

I think that there is an analogy here with the creation of life itself. It is interesting that clones (e.g. Dolly the sheep) do not have the same life expectancy or health as natural births. It may well be that in the process of creation, fertilisation is as important as what happens at a cellular level to create normal life. Life is far more than playing with cells. So it is with Christianity. Suffering is an important part of life. By suffering I do not think that it means in every case feeling pain. Suffering (*pathos*) also has the sense of feeling or experience, like the sick woman; *Mar 5:26 And (she) had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse.* Learning through suffering. “*Pathemata mathemata*”.

It may also be that suffering is affliction. The experience of the fires of life. It is this that forges our characters. I am reminded of the process of making a sword. The metal is mixed with different substances and beaten in the fire until the sword Smith has his desired effect. Each sword is unique, each sword has its own special strength and capability and it is far different from the original bits of metal that it came from. *Exo 19:5 Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:*

Christ was forged in the furnace of human experience so that He could be one who truly knew what it was like to be human. It was not experienced by watching a celestial cinema. He was part of the cast of life. Let us also note that what was good for Jesus is good for us. *Heb 12:6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.* Not because He is cruel but because it sets us apart from the crowd. *Heb 12:10 For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.*

God never promised His Sons an easy ride but He did promise them character.

Being Perfect

Heb 5:9 And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;

Perfectionism is a phenomenon which, if dealing exclusively in the Christian context, has appeared in Catholic, Arminian/Wesleyan, Quaker and Quietists circles. It has been most prominently displayed in the Keswick and Victorious Life movement embracing a teaching that a Christian can arrive at inherent spiritual perfection in this life. This is often also called sinless perfection although Wesley didn't quite go that far. Is this true? It has spawned many movements where Christians in their desire to improve personal holiness look for ‘second blessings’ and ‘baptisms in the Spirit’ to lift them above the world. It often leaves the rest of us feeling like very second class Christians! Let us explore the concept.

Gen 6:9 These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God. If Noah was perfect then within that perfection were the seeds of the sinful

nature because he was a drunk and lewd. *Gen 9:21 And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent.* That said, perfection was the demand of the law: *Deu 18:13 Thou shalt be perfect with the LORD thy God.*

David too was perfect in Heart: *1Ki 11:4 For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father.* David's perfection then embraced his adultery, murder and warfare. *1Ch 22:8 But the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight.*

Asa another king of Israel was perfect with imperfections. *1Ki 15:14 But the high places were not removed: nevertheless Asa's heart was perfect with the LORD all his days.* Yet he was in contempt of God and did not wholly rely on God and he did not remove the places of false worship. *2Ch 16:7 And at that time Hanani the seer came to Asa king of Judah, and said unto him, Because thou hast relied on the king of Syria, and not relied on the LORD thy God, therefore is the host of the king of Syria escaped out of thine hand.* *2Ch 15:7 Be ye strong therefore, and let not your hands be weak: for your work shall be rewarded.*

Perhaps it is in the life of Job that we see what the elements of perfection are. *Job 2:3 And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause.*

In some senses perfection is doing your best within the limits of sin. Anyone who says they have no sin is a liar but by walking with Christ we have that sin dealt with. *1Jn 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* *1Jn 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*

Noah walked with God and that is what made him perfect but it did not make him sinless. *Gen 9:6 Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.* Not that we should use this as an excuse for a sinful life. *Rom 6:1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?*

One of the historical mistakes that marks false perfection and holiness is that it is achieved solely by the individual. Martin Luther found this to be a mistake when he was doing a penance. What we are taught is that we can do nothing without Christ and any perfection we have is His, given to us in virtue of our relationship to Him. We will fail in youth and in old age but as long as we hold to Christ, we will be made perfect.

Heb 12:23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.

Heb 5:11 Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. Heb 5:12 For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. Heb 5:13 For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. Heb 5:14 But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

There is a note at the end of the Epistle (letter) that suggests that it was written to the Hebrew or Jewish people but as far as the instruction goes letters were circulated, read and accepted by all churches. *Heb 13:5 Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. Col 4:16 And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.*

It is estimated that the Epistle to the Hebrews was written about ad' 60 so the people who are reading it for the first time have been in the faith for many years. Despite this they are still babies as far as understanding goes.

I would hope that we feel that we are growing in Knowledge and Understanding of our faith. If we are not, it will reflect my failure to instruct and your failure to apprehend. Good ministry produces healthy Christians as Paul says in Ephesians. *Eph 4:11 Hee therefore gaue some to be Apostles, and some Prophets, and some Euangelists, and some Pastours, and Teachers, Eph 4:12 For the repairing of the Saintes, for the woorke of the ministerie, and for the edification of the bodie of Christ,* I like the words in the Geneva version.

The “gifts” to the church for building it up are all associated with instruction in the word of God. It doesn’t say “He gave youth leaders, music leaders, social leaders, activity leaders for the perfecting of the Saints....”. I am not saying that there is no role for such individuals but you will find increasingly that these are what the Churches are offering in place of the gifts of God. Where are these “gifts” today?

A local church are doing a series.

“We have just started a new Evening sermon series called Intelligent Church, where we find out how we can build a church **that is relevant** for the 21st century.

Let me tell you that the plans were laid 2,000 years ago by a Jesus who is the same every day. *Heb 13:8 Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.* What we should examine is how far we have departed from the plans. If we do that we will see why we have become irrelevant. It is because we have departed from the truth and look for alternate paths.

Go to the prophets in the Older Testament. What is their message to the Church? It is RETURN. Get a concordance and see how many times that it is used.

Jer 5:3 O LORD, are not thine eyes upon the truth? thou hast stricken them, but they have not

grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return.

We learn from these remarks in Hebrews that there must be a basic set of Christian teaching and an advanced set of Christian teaching. Christians are encouraged to move to the advanced level and not just remain content with a basic knowledge of the faith. What are the basics of the faith? Hebrews Chapter 6 explains.

I give you some advice. Never assume that everyone is at the same level of understanding as you even if they have been a Christian for many years. Also be careful about what you discuss and the level you discuss because some people cannot handle scriptures. *2Pe 3:16 As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.* You may also damage a relationship.

Encouragement

Heb 6:1 Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit.

The CEV puts it, “*We must try to become mature and start thinking about more than just the basic things we were taught about Christ*”. One of the hardest things to do is to be motivated to make progress when surrounded by mediocrity. If you were better than others say at some sport, what would be the reason to improve? If you could get by on your knowledge because others knew less than you why would you strive to learn more? In the realm of the blind, the one eyed man is king.

I see nothing in the churches that I have been in contact with that encourages me to higher things. I feel quite well placed and as knowledgeable as my contemporaries and certainly, there are few who exhort or encourage me to go on. I have though on many occasions been encouraged to do less. Less study, less zeal, less doctrine, in fact, I was even told that I would go mad with the amount of study I was doing. I took this as a compliment because Paul had the same disease. *Act 26:24 And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.*

But as Paul says: *2Co 10:12 For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.* We have a higher standard and should not judge our progress by looking at those around us. Our standard is Christ. *Php 3:14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*

Do you find it hard after so many years to make the effort to press on to the high calling of Christ? It would not be unusual if you did. Life has a way of making us weary but that is often because we let Christ slip out of our consciousness. *Heb 12:3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of*

sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

We can do all the outward religious duties and niceties of Christianity but at the same time be drying up inside. The well is not producing water and we can without care lapse into “nominal” Christianity.

So these words before us are a challenge as well as an encouragement. They are a challenge to go on and keep going on and they are an encouragement because there is something to go on to! There is new ground to plough, new treasures to discover, new sights to see, new things to learn and new understandings to be found.

There is the prospect of a greater maturity and strength of faith. *Eph 4:14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;* We become pillars of the church resisting the wicked winds of humanity.

I thank God for reminding us of these things and encouraging us on. They are an oasis in the desert of life where we can find rest and strength. *Heb 6:1 Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and offaith toward God,*

The spirit of the times must not dictate the creed of the times (Rushdoony)

Salvation

Heb 6:4 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, Heb 6:5 And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, Heb 6:6 If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

This raises the question “Can you lose your salvation”? Is it true that once saved always saved? It is suggested that Christ will ever hold on to the elect or chosen of God. *Joh 6:37 All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.* While Christ is faithful does this cover man’s apostasy or willful neglect of his duty to God? Does it mean that Christ will never cast out the wicked?

Who was Jesus referring to in the Garden of Gethsemane “none of them is lost but the son of perdition”. *Joh 17:12 While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled. Joh 18:19 The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine.*

It appears to have been the Apostles. But I do not think that in the absolute council of God anyone can say that he can be lost. *Php 4:3 And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life.* While these are great truths they are not unconditional promises. They do allow a man to go and indulge in willful sin and at the last enter heaven.

In Oscar Wilde's novel "The Picture of Dorian Gray", the young man Dorian has his portrait painted. He wishes that he could remain young and handsome forever. "*If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that—for that—I would give everything! Yes, there is nothing in the whole world I would not give! I would give my soul for that*". Dorian gets his wish and as he lives a wicked life, the picture ages and ravages, but he stays untouched.

I think that many Christians have that view of salvation, as if they have been given an absolute guarantee to live life as they please untouched by its ugliness and that another should bear the injuries. While it is true Christ intercedes for sins it is only where there is the repentant heart. He never saves the unrepentant.

So am I a chosen one? *Eph 1:4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:* Can we assume that we are among the chosen? Only as long as we exhibit the traits of the chosen?

Grace is a fragile bridge to God. *Gal 5:3 For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Gal 5:4 Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.* It would appear that men remove themselves from the grace of God by their disobedience. Christ is ever faithful to them, He does not cast them out but they walk away from Him.

The relationship with Christ and God is a marriage. If we defile the marriage, there is no coming back. *Deu 24:4 Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after that she is defiled; for that is abomination before the LORD: and thou shalt not cause the land to sin, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.*

Salvation is about endurance. *Mat 10:22 And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.* Like any marriage, it requires working at.

Spiritual Law of Grace

Heb 6:7 For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: Heb 6:8 But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned. Heb 6:9 But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.

"For the earth". The design of the apostle by this comparison is apparent. It is to show the consequences of not making a proper use of all the privileges which Christians have and the effect which would follow should those privileges fail to be improved. He says it is like the earth. If that absorbs the rain and produces an abundant harvest it receives the divine blessing. If not, it is cursed or is worthless. The design is to show that "if" Christians should become like the barren earth they would be cast away and lost.

There is a natural law in force governing crop growth there is a spiritual law governing growth in grace. The scriptures have many stories to tell of this:

The Fig Tree

Luk 13:6 He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Luk 13:7 Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? Luk 13:8 And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: Luk 13:9 And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

The Virgins

Mat 25:1 Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. Mat 25:2 And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Mat 25:3 They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: Mat 25:4 But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. Mat 25:5 While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. Mat 25:6 And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Mat 25:7 Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. Mat 25:8 And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. Mat 25:9 But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. Mat 25:10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Mat 25:11 Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. Mat 25:12 But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Mat 25:13 Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

The Talents

Mat 25:1 Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. Mat 25:2 And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Mat 25:3 They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: Mat 25:4 But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. Mat 25:5 While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. Mat 25:6 And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Mat 25:7 Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. Mat 25:8 And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. Mat 25:9 But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. Mat 25:10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Mat 25:11 Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. Mat 25:12 But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Mat 25:13 Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

Mathew 25 concludes with Christ's judgment and rebuke to those who led a fruitless life especially in acts of kindness to God's people. You see, it is not simply about growth in knowledge it is about putting that knowledge into action.

Jas 2:14 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? Jas 2:15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, Jas 2:16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

What is the value of inactive faith? It is worthless. For faith to have any value it must be outworked. There is a whole chapter in the Bible listing faith in action (Hebrews 11). Faith extends beyond charity to a life of obedience to God.

From our discussion last week we see that Christianity is not so much insurance policy against hell it is a business contract with heaven. It is not simply about absorbing religious knowledge and church attendance. I suppose the development of church buildings has to some extent isolated religion from daily life, however in the early churches meetings were in homes. Religious worship and practice were conducted on the same ground. Faith was less easy to hide.

Ministry

Heb 6:10 For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. Heb 6:11 And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: Heb 6:12 That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

The origin of the word “Minister” is uncertain but it has been transliterated into our own language as Deacon. There is a sense then in which we are all expected to be deacons and ministers and serve the saints. No doubt you will often have an image of “ministering” as being at the bedside of a sick person or giving food to the needy. While this may be a part of ministering it is much more than this.

- *Mat 20:26 but it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister;* Ministers are servants of others and Christianity is characterized by service
- *Act 26:16 But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;* Ministering is also about bearing a testimony of your experience
- *Rom 13:4 For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.* We minister in our work and the way we conduct our business.
- *Eph 4:29 Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.* Our daily lives and demeanor are a ministry. We might also say that there is a ministry without words simply in the way you behave.

- *1Ti 4:6 If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained.* Christian correction is a ministry. It is not just about feeding and caring for the body it is caring about the soul.
- *1Pe 4:10 As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.* Using our spiritual gifts for the benefit of others is a ministry.

Ministry is about the Christian community taking care of itself and each other within it. It is probably the distinguishing mark of the society that has been given so many names to reflect this fact such as Brethren and Friends. This core value is disappearing and we see much more emphasis on the self experience rather than the care.

Promises

Heb 6:13 For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself, Heb 6:14 Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee.

The issue of making promises is touched a number of times in scripture. *Mat 5:33 Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: Mat 5:34 But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Mat 5:35 Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Mat 5:36 Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. Mat 5:37 But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.*

Men often try to make what they say more valid by taking an oath. We see it in courts of law where men put their hand on the Bible and swear to tell the truth. A famous recent case was Jonathan Aitken who was charged with perjury and perverting the course of justice over Saudi Arabian arms dealing and in 1999 was jailed for 18 months of which he served seven. During the trial, his wife Lolicia, who later left him, was called as a witness to sign a supportive affidavit to the effect that she had paid his Paris hotel bill but did not appear. In the end with the case already in court investigative work by Guardian reporters into Swiss hotel and British Airways records showed that neither Victoria his daughter nor his wife had been in Paris at the time in question.

It is quite clear that swearing by anything is no proof of honesty and we are told to give straight answers. Yes or No.

So why would it be necessary for God Almighty to swear by anything let alone Himself since His word stands on its own? Well God is not bound by the law so he is free to act as He pleases so there must be another reason why God swore by Himself. It must be that He wanted to give us little faith individuals, the absolute certainty that without any shadow of a doubt, what He promised must happen. It is the triumph of Christ's kingdom.

Gen 22:17 That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; Gen 22:18 And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

Abraham is a wonderful role model and we must be grateful for Abraham's faith. Abraham secured in a manner of speaking the blessings that we receive . *Gen 22:10 And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. Gen 22:11 And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. Gen 22:12 And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. Gen 22:13 And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son. Gen 22:14 And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the LORD it shall be seen. Gen 22:15 And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, Gen 22:16 And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: Gen 22:17 That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;* If he had wavered, if he had disobeyed then the whole plan of redemption was put in jeopardy.

I have not met anyone who would willingly give up their children. There was a programme on television the other night on Iran and it spoke of the terrible losses in the war with Iraq. Mothers sent their sons off to certain death but as one mother said it was never done willingly or with any joy.

Abraham was "one of a kind" as we might say, someone whose obedience deserved the highest accolade. As God looked upon his lowly creatures' obedience what greater reward could He give than His own word? It is as if God says, "Well Abraham, you gave me the best of yourself, can I do any less than that for you? Here is myself."

The experience carried Abraham through life and he became the example to us all of taking God at his word. *Rom 4:20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; Rom 4:21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.*

Our Anchor

Heb 6:19 Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;

We looked at God's promise last time and saw that it was based upon His character and nature. It was as we might say immutable, that is unable to be changed. In case we find the theology a little difficult to grasp we are given a visual image of this truth. I imagine that the writer was inspired to

this analogy through travel. In the ancient world men would travel by sea as Paul did. It was quicker and probably safer and was the “airline” of the day. There wasn’t much to do on a ship and I suppose that a lot of time was given to meditation on nature, the sea and the ship. The anchor is a fascinating artifact.

The Greek word for anchor is Αγκυραν, so it is another Biblical word that has come straight into our language. It is related to the Greek "ἀγκύλος" where we get the word ankle and the Latin "angulus" meaning bent. An anchor is something that is bent. What is the purpose of an anchor? It is to stop a ship from moving.

If you are in quiet waters you might only need to tie a stone on a string but if the sea got rough the anchor would be too weak and begin to drag and the ship would be in danger of going onto the rocks. The biggest of three anchors for the Titanic weighed 15.5 tons and was hauled from Netherton Ironworks to the nearest railway station by no less than 20 Shire Horses. That is a huge weight. Why do you think that the anchors have a bend in them?

We are told that we have an anchor for the soul. That means that we have something that stops us from drifting onto the rocks, from being blown about. *Eph 4:14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;* It is something sure and steadfast. The word for sure is ασφαλη which is where the word asphalt (bitumen) comes from. In the Greek version of the Old Testament it is used to describe the material that Noah used to waterproof the ark. *Gen 6:14 Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch.* It was also the material that was used to stick bricks together hence the idea of structural security and sureness.

We have then the cable tying our soul to an anchor but where is the anchor fixed to? Where is my soul at this moment? It is in the heavenlies, certainly as good as being there made possible by this cable. *Eph 2:4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Eph 2:5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) Eph 2:6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: Eph 2:7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. Eph 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Eph 2:9 Not of works, lest any man should boast. Eph 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*

This anchor of the soul, if we follow the anchor cable, will find that it is firmly anchored in the Tabernacle, in the Holy of Holies. *Heb 9:2 For there was a Tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the sanctuary.*

Of course, as we know the Tabernacle was a metaphor or type of Christ. It was a way of showing the hidden glories of Christ to God’s Old Testament people before it was officially released to the world. It was a sort of press release of what was to come but disguised. It was clearly understood by one woman who wrote a hymn about this verse.

Priscilla Jane Owens (1829-1907) was a teacher in Baltimore, Maryland, for almost half a century. She taught Sunday school at the Union Square Methodist Episcopal Church. Most of her hymns were written for her Sunday school students.

It is safely moored, 'twill the storm withstand,
For 'tis well secured by the Savior's hand;
And the cables, passed from His heart to mine,
Can defy that blast, thro' strength divine.

Ancient Priesthood

Heb 6:20 Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. Melchizedek was both king of Salem and priest of God Most High. He was the one who went out and gave Abraham his blessing when Abraham returned from defeating the kings.

We are introduced to the idea that there was priesthood long before the Levites became priests for the Jewish Nation. The word priest "Cohen" first occurs with the appearance of this man Melchizedek who was also a king. *Gen 14:8 And there went out the king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrah, and the king of Admah, and the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (the same is Zoar;) and they joined battle with them in the vale of Siddim;* This shows us that God was at work in the world outside of the family of Abraham. In fact we could probably have had another Bible that covered God's dealings with many other of his servants. It also shows us that the Bible as we have it has a very clear and much narrower view of God's dealings than was possible.

We are left to speculate when and how the priesthood came about? It may have started right at the beginning with Abel, the brother of Cain. *Heb 11:4 By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh. Heb 12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.*

Since the right to offer sacrifices is a privilege from God we might be right to assume that Abel was the first priest. *Heb 5:1 For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: Heb 5:2 Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. Heb 5:3 And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins. Heb 5:4 And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. Heb 5:5 So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee. Heb 5:6 As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. Heb 5:7 Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Heb 5:8 Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; Heb 5:9 And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; Heb 5:10 Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.*

We note that Job also was a Priest and offered sacrifice on behalf of his family. *Job 1:5 And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.*

While religion eventually became focused in the Nation of Israel it is quite clear that it was very much a family business that grew to a national status. There must have been a very large number of priests at the time of Abraham.

We might suggest that the knowledge of God was quite widely distributed in ancient times. Pharaoh in Egypt acknowledged Elohim the creator of the Earth. *Gen 41:38 And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is? Gen 1:1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*

From this we might expect that much of the religion and religious practices that we see in ancient history however distorted, find their way back to Adam. In fact every ancient culture appears to have had blood sacrifice in some form or another.

There is a clear tendency for man to distort the religion of God. We don't have to go far to see this for there is hardly a state church that you could go into and make any association with the practice of early Christianity. So we might expect that the further back in time that you go the purer the religion, just as the water in a stream is purer at source.

Here then we find our Priest King Melchizedek meeting the Patriarch Abraham and not with a sacrifice that would have been recognisable to the Jewish world. He comes with bread and wine and with those sacred emblems blesses father Abraham. *Gen 14:18 And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God.* I think that as Abraham looked at Melchizedek his eye caught a glimpse of Christ, for as our text tells us Christ was of the same priesthood as Melchizedek, a far more ancient line and a line as we shall see, far superior to that of the Jews.

As we come to the Lord's Table let us not forget that the meeting with Abraham is not dissimilar to our meeting with Christ. It comes after a great victory. *Mat 26:26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body.* The word "it" is not in the Greek, for those with the Authorised Version it is in italics. Did Jesus bless bread? I think like Melchizedek, He was blessing the receivers.

Seminal Identity

Heb 7:7 And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better. Heb 7:8 And here men that die receive tithes; but there he receiveth them, of whom it is witnessed that he liveth. Heb 7:9 And as I may so say, Levi also who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham. Heb 7:10 For he was yet in the loins of his father when Melchisedec met him.

Do you ever pray for your generations to come? The Bible teaches us that they are with us as we speak according to the teaching that is brought before us today. The teaching or doctrine that we are looking at is called the Doctrine of Seminal Identity. It is a teaching that explains some Biblical issues for example the question of "How can I be held guilty for the sin of Adam" and "How can we get the benefits of Jesus' death"?

Rom 5:12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: The Greek verb for sin suggests that it was a singular act. That is ,we were there when Adam sinned. No wonder Adam felt guilt and no wonder he covered his private parts. *Gen 3:7 And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.* He not only felt his own guilt but the guilt of the generations to come. So too did Eve.

This opens another issue and it relates to abortion and murder. According to our reasoning, the future generations are realities long before the 24 week viability age so any attempt to destroy a baby would be considered as murder. This also raises the thorny issue of contraception.

As children were the promise of their covenant and as every man had some reason to think that the Messiah should spring from his family, any injury done to a woman with child, by which the fruit of her womb might be destroyed was considered a very heavy offence and as the crime was committed principally against the husband. The degree of punishment was left to his discretion. *Exo 21:22 If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine.* But if injury followed, that is, if the child had been fully formed and was killed by this means or the woman lost her life in consequence then the punishment was as in other cases of murder. The person was put to death.

Also grabbing a man's private parts carried a severe penalty. *Deu 25:11 When men strive together one with another, and the wife of the one draweth near for to deliver her husband out of the hand of him that smiteth him, and putteth forth her hand, and taketh him by the secrets: Deu 25:12 Then thou shalt cut off her hand, thine eye shall not pity her.*

Seminal identity also explains how we get life in Christ. *1Co 15:21 For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. 1Co 15:22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. 1Co 15:23 But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. 1Co 15:24 Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.*

We are part of the "seed". *Gal 3:29 And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. Gal 3:16 Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.*

For the moment the idea that the writer of Hebrews wants to establish is that there is a relationship between Abraham and Levi, one of his descendants because the descendant is considered as being present in his loins as far as God is concerned. This also means that Levi is to some extent implicated

in the activities of his ancestor Abraham. Just as Adam sinned and we are implicated in that sin, when Abraham paid a tenth of his spoils to Melchizedec, Levi was considered to have been a party to that transaction. You may think that this teaching is interesting but it is more than that. It is critical to understanding why the Levitical priesthood of the Jews is abolished.

Perfection

Heb 7:9 And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham. Heb 7:10 For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him. If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchizedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?

The first strand of the argument that the writer of Hebrews has made is that the Levites were subject to the order of Melchizedek (Seminal Identity) through Abraham's tithe. Now the second strand is drawn which relates to perfection. The Greek word for perfection comes from Teleos, the end or completion of a person. That completion and perfection can only be found in Christ. *Eph 4:13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:* Perfection could never be found under the Mosaic system of law and sacrifices. People who think that doing good works can get them to heaven should take note of this. The best of the best of the High Priests failed entirely to make any of their congregation perfect.

Heb 7:11 If therefore perfection (Gk. Τελείωσις) were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?

The failure therefore required a remedy of a far better and more effective priesthood. The priesthood of Christ. When Jesus was dying on the cross, He said something in Greek, because it made no sense in Aramaic. He said in the Greek "τετέλεσται", It is finished.

Joh 19:30 When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished (Gk. τετέλεσται): and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

"Tetelestai" is a Greek word meaning 'paid in full'. If you were in that time and spoke Greek you would immediately have understood the meaning of the word. When someone paid off their bill in the marketplace they would run through the streets shouting "tetelestai, tetelestai" my debt is paid in full. (It is the Perfect tense in Greek). When Jesus was on the cross His last words were "It is finished" or in the Greek 'tetelstai' meaning the debt is paid. He was referring to the debt for our sins. Jesus paid the debt for our sins in full on the cross.

The priests of the Older Testament could not perfect forgiveness. *Heb 10:1 for the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.*

They could never stamp “tetelestai” on the soul. The Jewish priest could never utter the words “Tetelstai, It is finished” because it never was. Year after year the blood letting went on and on and none could say that were truly cleansed of sin. Guilt remained.

So far then the strands of our argument are:

1. Levi, the priesthood were subject to a higher priesthood.
2. The Priesthood of Levi could never perfect a man and his conscience.

How was a person saved under the Older Testament? This will be discussed later as Proleptic Justification.

The New Priesthood

Heb 7:12 For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. Heb 7:13 For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. Heb 7:14 For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood.

So far then we have developed the strands of our argument for the superiority of Christ which are:

1. Levi, the priesthood were subject to a higher priesthood.
2. The Priesthood of Levi could never perfect a man and his conscience.

Before we move on to the third strand of the argument I want to comment on the method of the argument. It is based upon the Relevance of scriptures. The argument of the writer is taken from ancient documents dating back 2000 years and accepted as valid in the first century. There is no critical review of the historicity and truth of the words. They are fact.

In Bob Bell's book Velvet Elvis (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), the trend in turning scripture into a metaphor is put forward as a way of making scripture relevant for today. Quote:

“We have to embrace the Bible as the wild, uncensored, passionate account it is of people experiencing the living God. Doubting the one true God.” The Bible is a “human product....rather than the product of divine fiat”.

Consequently, the Bible is helpful not primarily as the factual revelation of God's real acts in history but as a metaphor to help us understand our own experiences:

“Is the greatest truth about Adam and Eve that it happened or that it happens? This story...is true for us because it is our story. We have all taken the fruit. We have all crossed boundaries....This is why the Bible loses its power for so many communities. They fall into the trap of thinking that the Bible is just about things that happened a long time ago.”

Well it is just about that. It is fact. *Luk 1:1 Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in*

order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Luk 1:2 Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; Luk 1:3 It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, Luk 1:4 That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed. 1Co 15:3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; Joh 20:21 Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.

The fact argued here is for a change in the law governing the priesthood because Jesus by birth was not of the tribe of Levi but of the tribe of Judah. Judah had nothing to do with the priesthood.

There was therefore the need for a Divine restructuring of the priesthood and a new law. If you were a Jew and you accepted this argument you would be parting company with your Jewish religion and adopting the Christian faith. It would have been a truly liberating experience. You would not always be looking to see if you were ritually unclean. You would have a very clear conscience about the forgiveness of sin. You would be free of dietary constraints, you could eat anything and for the first time in your life you could even eat a bacon sandwich.

You may begin to understand why such a complicated argument is being put forward here if you begin to think about the number of changes that it would bring about in people's lives. It needed a solid argument to bring about a change in attitude.

So don't be shaken by modernist views of scripture invented by those who have lost their way. As Jesus said: *Mat 24:35 Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.*

A Priest Forever

Heb 7:14 For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. Everyone knows he came from the tribe of Judah and Moses never said that priests would come from that tribe. All of this becomes clearer when someone who is like Melchizedek is appointed to be a priest. That person wasn't appointed because of his ancestors but because his life can never end. The Scriptures say about him, Heb 5:6 In another place, God says, "You are a priest forever just like Melchizedek." CEV

So far then we see the strands of our argument for the superiority of Christ are:

1. Levi, the priesthood were subject to a higher priesthood.
2. The Priesthood of Levi could never perfect a man and his conscience.
3. There was the need for a Divine restructuring of the priesthood and a new law.

During His life on earth as Messiah the anointed king we perhaps see Christ more as the King of the Jews as we focus on His roots in the tribe of Judah. *Mat 1:1 The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.* Christ did not attempt to undermine the Levitical Priesthood in His life. He supported it as a legitimate authority ordained by God "Show yourself to the priest". *Mar 1:4 John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Luk 17:14 And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the*

priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed.

He also subjected Himself to its institutions and ordinances (Circumcision, Passover, Synagogue). Although Christ was a priest from eternity He takes up the role as our mediator upon His resurrection. *Heb 5:5 So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee. Act 13:33 God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.*

In this aspect of His priesthood Jesus is the “middle man”, the mediator between us and the Father. *1Ti 2:5 For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;* There is no ordinary man even though he dress in the finest robes that can broker your relationship with God.

You may ask “why, if the death of Christ forgave sin, do we need a mediator?” It is because the forgiveness of sin is conditional. *1Jn 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleaneth us from all sin. 1Jn 2:1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:*

This aspect of our faith is often grossly overlooked. Christianity tends to adopt the attitude that because we are Christians everything in the garden must be alright. As in any relationship it requires maintenance to keep it working smoothly and we have to understand that sin constantly mars that relationship. How would you feel about someone who continually abused the privileges of friendship? A person who failed to respect your personal property, stole from you, disobeyed your house rules and at times was an embarrassment to your good name and at the next meeting with you didn’t even apologise. I am sure that it wouldn’t be long before they were off your Christmas card list?

Friendship is based upon mutual respect and to my mind that is lacking in today’s happy clappy churches. We need to recover some of that quietness that sits in awe of Majesty, a friendship that constantly looks to avoid offending our best friend.

Melchizedek is viewed as “everlasting”. In a sense his priesthood had no beginning and no end. He appears and disappears from the pages of scripture without dying. Jesus is also alive and a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

The Law 1

Heb 7:19 For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God.

Mat 23:23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

Jews were obsessed with LAW.

Many of the Jews lapsed into the practice of legal obedience. These separatists or Pharisees emphasized strict interpretation and observance of the Mosaic Law in both its oral and written form. Many of the details that they were entangled in are written in a book called the Mishnah (Hebrew **מִשְׁנָה**, m'shnah, "repetition"). In early Jewish history, the "Oral Torah" or "oral law" was an unwritten tradition based upon what Judaism holds God to have told Moses on Mount Sinai that was not incorporated into the written Torah. Do you believe that?

The Torah is the most important document in Judaism revered as the inspired word of God revealed to Moses. The word Torah means "teaching," "instruction," or "law" in Hebrew.

We may view the word Law in a number of ways:

- **Civil law** Mat 5:40 *And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.*
- **Old Testament** Mat 11:13 *For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.*
- **Torah** Luk 24:44 *And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me.*
- **A System** Joh 1:17 *For the law was given by Moses Rom 4:13 For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith..*
- **Specific** Rom 7:2 *For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband.*
- **Instrument** Rom 7:5 *For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.*
- **Commands** Rom 7:9 *For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.*
- **General principle** Rom 7:23 *But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.*
- **System** Gal 4:4 *But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,*

In what sense then do we view law in our study verse? I would say in all senses (System, Specific, Civil, Instrument, Command etc). The idea that any system of rules and obedience to those rules could make a man perfect is alien to scripture. There are many systems of religion where men "work" to be perfect. There are religious laws that they have to follow to achieve perfection.

Christianity requires no works. It rests on the works of another, namely Christ.

The Law 2

Heb 7:19 For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God.

We continue our theme of the law and its failure to redeem man from sin. Paul explains this in the 7th Chapter of the book of Romans but the passage has caused some difficulties for people because when Paul speaks of his “wretchedness” they consider he is speaking in the present tense of a believer. *Rom 7:24 O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* Well I find no wretchedness in the work of Christ and I think that Romans 7 is looking at the effects of sin and law in any “man” as he is drawn to the grace of God.

Man by nature does not have the law in his life and he was not created with an innate sense of God’s law. Romans 2 is often badly mistranslated but it should read: *Rom 2:14 For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Heb 8:10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:*

We know that Adam and Eve wanted the knowledge of the law and to obtain it they ate of the tree which killed them, namely the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil. In the eating they were cursed with sin. So if man were created with knowledge of God’s law, he would not have needed the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. *Rom 7:7 I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.*

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is a symbol of the law and it was through that law that man was condemned to death. The law is like that fruit that Adam ate. Adam was without the knowledge of sin in the garden of Eden but when he ate of that tree it brought sin to life. There was a time in my life and no doubt yours, when we had no conscience of sin. We did evil without a care of its effect and consequences and like others every man did that which was right in his own eyes. It was that conviction of sin that the Holy Spirit brought in our lives through the commands of God that brought us up short.

The wretchedness of sin that Paul speaks of is only cured through and in Christ. *Rom 7:24 O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Rom 7:25 I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.* The law could perfect nothing only Christ alone could deliver.

It is unfortunate that we have in our Bibles a chapter division at the end of Romans Chapter 7. We remind ourselves that there were no chapter divisions in the original manuscript but however helpful these are they interrupt the flow. *Rom 7:25 I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. Rom 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Rom 8:2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.*

There is no judgement to those in Christ. We are free. Christ Jesus has made me free. As the old Negro spiritual song went:

"Free at last, free at last, Thank God Almighty, we're free at last."

The Law 2

Heb 7:28 For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.

We are now concluding the section that has argued for the superiority of the priesthood of Christ with a look at the unchanging nature of that priesthood. *Heb 7:24 But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.*

We may be sure that because the priesthood did not change the things that the priesthood of Christ deal with have not changed. Sin is the same as ever. No new sins, only newer ways of committing them. You would imagine by the way many Christians live their lives that there is no need for the Priesthood of Christ because they never acknowledge sin in their lives. The fact that we have a Priest in Jesus means we must have sin in our lives. *1Jn 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*

You will notice that sin is not so much a subject in our hymns these days. Martin Luther's hymn reflects a more introspective age when Christian themes were more serious.

*Thou Judge by Whom each empire fell,
When pride of power o'ercame it,
Convict us now, if we we rebel,
Our nation judge, and shame it.
In each sharp crisis, Lord, appear,
Forgive, and show our duty clear:
To serve Thee by repentance.*

We may also have confidence that as God has dealt with those saints of old, He will deal with us and with those generations to come. *Heb 13:8 Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.* This unchanging truth should also warn us about adopting new and unBiblical ways. The priesthood holds the old truths.

He who also bears with us in life, bears us through death into the new life. *1Co 15:45 And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.* We are not of ourselves immortal (the Greek word is athanasia or deathless). That quality solely belongs to Christ who graciously gives it to us. *1Ti 6:16 Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.*

As we move into the 8th chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews we have in the opening verses a summary of what has gone before.

As we approach this new section let us just remind ourselves where we have travelled from in the last 2 years.

- The superiority of Christ over the prophets 1 v 1 - 3
- The superiority of Christ over the angels 1 v 4 – 2 v 18
- The superiority of Christ over Moses 3 v 1 – 4 v 13
- The superiority of Christ's priesthood 4 v 14 – 7 v 28

The Superiority of Christ's Covenant.

Heb 8:5 Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the Tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount. Exo 25:40 And look that thou make them after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount.

The Tabernacle of which we are speaking is the tent or mobile Temple where God was worshiped in the wilderness and we are told that it was made according to the pattern (Greek *tupos*) that was shown to Moses in the Mountain. By this we understand that when Moses received the law on Sinai he also received some plans. He had the tablets of stone with the 10 words on them and the design for a tent. *Exo 24:18 And Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and gat him up into the mount: and Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights.*

God did not ask Moses to invent some good rules and design Him a place to be represented. God already had this sorted out and it was up to man to do what he was told. When we look at the Tabernacle we are looking at a construction that was designed in heaven. There was a “type” (as in type writer) or pattern in heaven and as we shall see it has in its design a meaning. God is the Divine Architect. When we look at human designs there is also meaning and purpose in great buildings. We also see the distinctive style of the designer (see Wren’s St Paul’s Cathedral below).

Moses only came down with the stones from Sinai so where was the plan? I believe that Moses saw it in a vision and that vision was confirmed by the Spirit, in the gifts given to the workmen who built it. *Exo 31:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Exo 31:2 See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: Exo 31:3 And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, Exo 31:4 To devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass, Exo 31:5 And in cutting of stones, to set them, and in carving of timber, to work in all manner of workmanship. Exo 31:6 And I, behold, I have given with him Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan: and in the hearts of all that are wise hearted I have put wisdom, that they may make all that I have commanded thee; Exo 31:7 The Tabernacle of the congregation, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is thereupon, and all the furniture of the Tabernacle, Exo 31:8 And the table and his furniture, and the pure candlestick with all his furniture, and the altar of incense, Exo 31:9 And the altar of burnt offering with all his furniture, and the laver and his foot, Exo 31:10 And the cloths of service,*

and the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments of his sons, to minister in the priest's office, Exo 31:11 And the anointing oil, and sweet incense for the holy place: according to all that I have commanded thee shall they do.

There are numerous components to the Tabernacle that you can read about in Exodus chapter 25 to 30, which as you read you should consider the words “Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things”, the objects before us are shadows. The Tabernacle is a shadow of something in heaven.

We also notice the order in which they are displayed to us. It is in my opinion not a random order. It starts from the throne of God (the Ark of the Covenant) and works outward towards the laver (the washing bowl) at the entrance to the Tabernacle. If we were to approach the Lord we would move in the reverse direction.

Now the scripture does not explain directly the meaning of each of these objects but I believe that their meanings are contained in scripture. I believe that we can relate each of these objects to a single source, the person of Christ. What I am saying is that the pattern that Moses was shown was Christ Himself and by that I mean that the Tabernacle and its components are all facets of Christ.

You will ask well how is this possible? I will give you the first example. *Rom 3:25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;* The word “propitiation” (Greek ιλαστήριον) is the word used in the LXX (Greek Old Testament) for Mercy Seat. *Exo 25:17 And thou shalt make a mercy seat of pure gold: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof.*

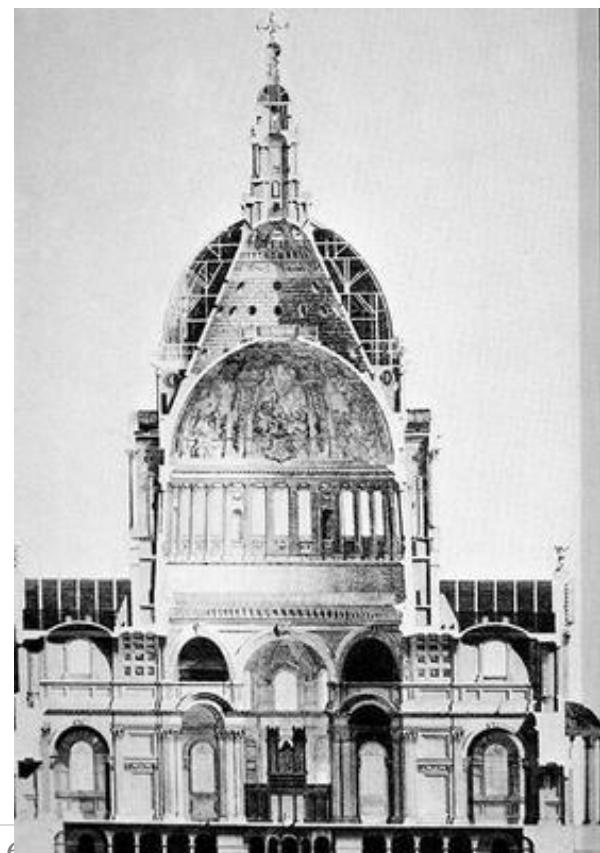
So Darby is right to translate the verse. *Rom 3:25 whom God has set forth a **mercy-seat**, through faith in his blood, for the shewing forth of his righteousness, in respect of the passing by the sins that had taken place before, through the forbearance of God;*

Jesus is the mercy seat - the place of reconciliation where a man can meet with God. It is the place where man can communicate with God. It is where man finds atonement. Using this key we shall God willing unlock the meaning of the Tabernacle.

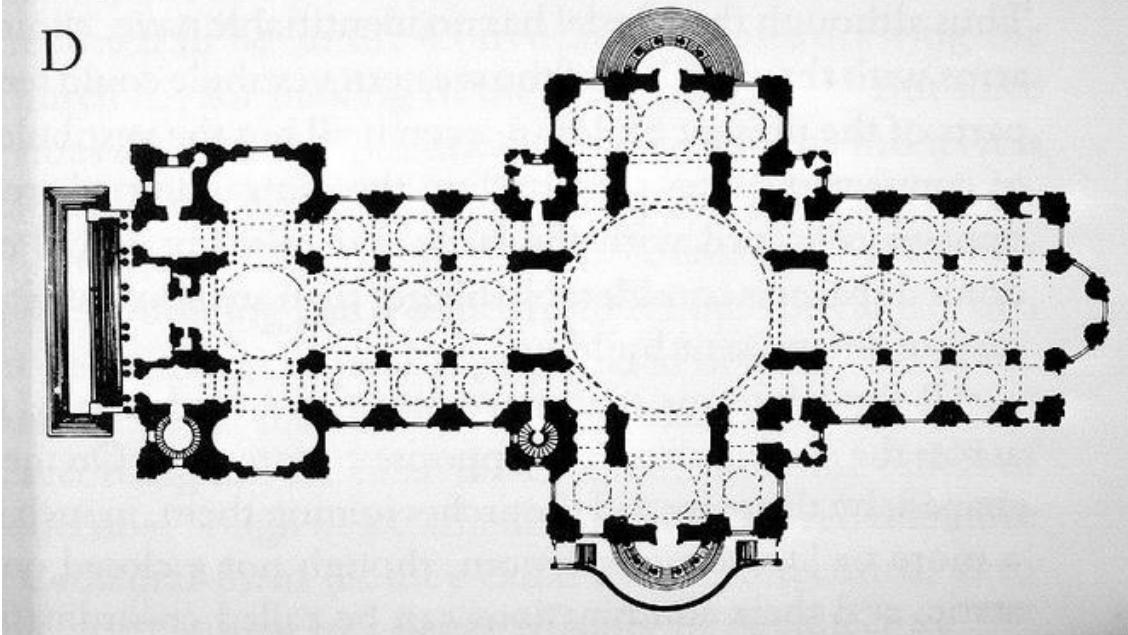
ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL

<https://www.stpauls.co.uk/>

St Paul's is built in the shape of a cross, with the dome crowning the intersection of the arms. It is one of the largest Cathedral domes in the world, 111.3 metres high. It weighs approximately 65,000 tonnes and is supported by eight pillars.



D



Christ the Centre 1

Heb 8:5 Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the Tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount Exo 25:40 And look that thou make them after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount.

We observed that the theme designed into the fabric of the Tabernacle was the Person of Christ. Recently I spoke with some Jehovah Witness ladies. One of the things that has become very clear to me about that sect is that Christ is not central to their personal faith. When you ask for example "how do you KNOW that your sins are forgiven?" they have great difficulties in giving a straight answer. Christ is not central to their theology. They concentrate on The Kingdom rather than the King.

When you read scripture you will find again and again that its central theme is Christ. *Joh 20:31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. Rev 19:10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. Rev 5:6 And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.*

The Centrality of the Lamb. *Joh 20:31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. Rev 19:10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. Rev 5:6 And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.*

Christ in the Prophets. *1Pe 1:11 Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.* Look also at the "I am's" of Scripture, I am the bread of life: I am the light of the world, I am the door of the sheep. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd, I am the Son of God, I am the resurrection, and the life: I am the way, the truth, and the life: I am the true vine, I am the first and the last. It should not surprise us that the Tabernacle is also an image of Christ.

At the beginning of his gospel, John refers to Christ the Word as "Tabernacling" amongst us. *Joh 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.* The incarnation of Christ was the fuller revelation of the Old Testament Tabernacle in the wilderness.

What then are we to make of the following components of the Tabernacle?

Lampstand. *Rev 1:13 And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. Joh 9:5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.* The lampstand carried the lamps that burned the oil. The churches are the lights burning the oil of the spirit. *Mat 5:14 Ye are the light of the world.*

Table of Shewbread. *Joh 6:31 Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. Joh 6:32 Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. Joh 6:33 For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. This shows that Jesus is the bread of life, that which sustains life.*

Altar of incense. *Rev 8:3 And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.*

Again we have shown how Christ is imprinted on the emblems of the Tabernacle. As Jesus said: *Jon 14:9 he that hath seen me hath seen the Father.* Men who seek God would do no better than to start with the revelation of Christ in scripture.

Christ the Centre 2

Heb 8:5 Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the Tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount. Exo 25:40 And look that thou make them after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount.

The Outer Court. The first thing we see as we approach the structure is the "fence" constructed of white linen standing seven and one-half feet high, one hundred fifty feet long, and seventy-five feet wide. The walls are seven and one half feet in height preventing anyone from seeing into the structure. The Outer Court would never be filled to capacity and of course could not hold all of the

people of Israel. There is only one door that leads to eternal life, one entrance into communion with and worship of the Father and one entrance to the throne room of God - His name is Jesus.

The Brass Altar. *Exo 27:1 And thou shalt make an altar of shittim wood, five cubits long, and five cubits broad; the altar shall be foursquare: and the height thereof shall be three cubits. Exo 27:2 And thou shalt make the horns of it upon the four corners thereof: his horns shall be of the same: and thou shalt overlay it with brass. Exo 27:3 And thou shalt make his pans to receive his ashes, and his shovels, and his basons, and his fleshhooks, and his firepans: all the vessels thereof thou shalt make of brass. Exo 27:4 And thou shalt make for it a grate of network of brass; and upon the net shalt thou make four brasen rings in the four corners thereof. Exo 27:5 And thou shalt put it under the compass of the altar beneath, that the net may be even to the midst of the altar. Exo 27:6 And thou shalt make staves for the altar, staves of shittim wood, and overlay them with brass. Exo 27:7 And the staves shall be put into the rings, and the staves shall be upon the two sides of the altar, to bear it. Exo 27:8 Hollow with boards shalt thou make it: as it was shewed thee in the mount, so shall they make it.*

We are confronted with our need to have a sacrifice made in order to approach God. The spiritually dead man could not save himself and death was the penalty for sin. The altar is five cubits square, five symbolising the number of grace. We must also note that man could not make his own sacrifice a mediator (priest) was necessary.

It is here at the altar/cross that God meets us, the sinner. If the Israelite rejected the Altar he was shut out from the mercy of God. If we reject the altar which is Jesus, we have no hope of salvation without God's judgment of our sin. The first sacrifice prepared and presented on the altar was burned with fire that came from heaven. It was not ignited by man but by God. The priests were instructed to never let the fire go out. It was to be continual throughout all generations. There is no time when God takes a break from showering on us His mercy and grace when we come to the altar/cross of Christ. He is always prepared to meet sinners, anytime day or night and cleanse them with His holy fire that burned His holy sacrifice, His only Son our redeemer. Four horns are strategically placed on the altar, one at each corner. The sacrifice was tied to the horns holding it firmly in place.

The Laver. *Exo 30:18 Thou shalt also make a laver of brass, and his foot also of brass, to wash withal: and thou shalt put it between the Tabernacle of the congregation and the altar, and thou shalt put water therein. Exo 30:19 For Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet thereat: Exo 30:20 When they go into the Tabernacle of the congregation, they shall wash with water, that they die not; or when they come near to the altar to minister, to burn offering made by fire unto the LORD: Exo 30:21 So they shall wash their hands and their feet, that they die not: and it shall be a statute for ever to them, even to him and to his seed throughout their generations.*

The washing that followed the sacrifice is similar to the Baptism of the believer. *Rom 6:4 Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

Baptism does not precede the acceptance of Christ's sacrifice. Neither can someone take on the promises for you. You couldn't sacrifice for someone else it is personal.

1Pe 3:21 The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

The symbolism is then that before we can enter into the place of fellowship with God - the Sanctuary, we must be forgiven of sin and have our consciences washed. Again we see the shrinking dimensions. If the outer court would not hold all Israel then the sanctuary would hold even less. We might have expected the space to increase not decrease so it is a warning that not all who set out on the road to God make it. There are those even as we speak who think that they are on the path to heaven but are in reality following another broadway.

Christ the Centre 3

Heb 8:5 Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the Tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount. Exo 25:40 And look that thou make them after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount.

I thought it would be helpful to trace the transition in worship that sees the Tabernacle transformed into the Temple at Jerusalem (Solomon's Temple). The Tabernacle was the official place of worship after the Israelites entered the promised land of Canaan and it was pitched in Shiloh the tribal land of Ephraim. *Jos 18:1 And the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the Tabernacle of the congregation there. And the land was subdued before them.* It was there that Joshua cast lots for the distribution of land to the 12 tribes. *Jos 18:10 And Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before the LORD: and there Joshua divided the land unto the children of Israel according to their divisions.* Shiloh is now in the disputed west bank territory.

It was at Shiloh that Hannah went to the Tabernacle to ask God for a child and this resulted in Samuel who was the last of the great prophets/Judges before Israel adopted kings. It was at Shiloh that God punished Israel and Eli for their apostasy and the Ark of the Covenant was captured in battle. *1 Sam 4:15 Now Eli was ninety and eight years old; and his eyes were dim, that he could not see. 1Sa 4:16 And the man said unto Eli, I am he that came out of the army, and I fled to day out of the army. And he said, What is there done, my son? 1Sa 4:17 And the messenger answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken. 1Sa 4:18 And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years. 1Sa 4:19 And his daughter in law, Phinehas' wife, was with child, near to be delivered: and when she heard the tidings that the ark of God was taken, and that her father in law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and travailed; for her pains came upon her. 1Sa 4:20 And about the time of her death the women that stood by her said unto her, Fear not; for thou hast born a son. But she answered not, neither did she regard it. 1Sa 4:21 And she named the child*

Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father in law and her husband. 1Sa 4:22 *And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken.* The capture of the Ark marked the end of the turbulent period of the Judges of Israel where faith yoyo'd from one generation to the next. We do not know the fate of the original Tabernacle...it just disappeared.

After many trials and tribulations, David restored the ark to Israel and it was brought to the City of David at Jerusalem and was placed in a tent built by David. 2Sa 6:12 *And it was told king David, saying, The LORD hath blessed the house of Obededom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God. So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obededom into the city of David with gladness.* David wanted to build a permanent house for God but that fell to his son Solomon.....2Sa 7:1 *And it came to pass, when the king sat in his house, and the LORD had given him rest round about from all his enemies;* 2Sa 7:2 *That the king said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains.* 2Sa 7:3 *And Nathan said to the king, Go, do all that is in thine heart; for the LORD is with thee.* 2Sa 7:4 *And it came to pass that night, that the word of the LORD came unto Nathan, saying,* 2Sa 7:5 *Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the LORD, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in?* 2Sa 7:6 *Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a Tabernacle.....* 1Ch 22:8 *But the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Thou hast shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars: thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight.* 1Ch 22:9 *Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days.* 1Ch 22:10 *He shall build an house for my name; and he shall be my son, and I will be his father; and I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel for ever.* 1Ch 22:11 *Now, my son, the LORD be with thee; and prosper thou, and build the house of the LORD thy God, as he hath said of thee.*

The Temple of Solomon survived until the invasion of Babylon some 450 years later when God sent the Israelites in to captivity for 70 years for their failure to observe His Sabbath.

At the end of the captivity Cyrus, King of Persia gave permission (To Ezra and Nehemiah) to return and rebuild the old Temple but it was a shadow of its former glory. Ezr 3:12 *But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy:*

The Temple was given a complete rebuild by Herod the great just before the birth of Jesus and this is the Temple that we know in our New Testament. It restored Jewish pride but it became a place of religious trade. It was here that Jesus scoured the traders and made the famous claim that he would rebuild this Temple. Joh 2:15 *And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the Temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables;* Joh 2:16 *And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise.* Joh 2:17 *And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.* Joh 2:18 *Then answered the Jews and said unto*

him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Joh 2:19 Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up.

It was at the death of Jesus that the Temple veil was torn. *Mar 15:38 And the veil of the Temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.* This shows that God still honoured the fabric of this new Temple but it was to be short lived and destroyed some 40 years later by Titus and the 10th Legion.

The Temple had to go. It was by now part of the Older Testament ritual that had become superseded by Jesus Christ. It had no further part to play. Finally, the true Tabernacle had arrived, the shadows were gone. *Rev 21:22 And I saw no Temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the Temple of it.*

Covenants 1

Heb 8:6 But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. Heb 8:7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. Heb 8:8 For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah:

What is a Covenant? A covenant in its most general sense is a solemn promise to do or not do something specified. **Covenir** Lt. to be fitting, a usually formal, solemn and binding agreement: “Compact” a written agreement or promise usually under seal between two or more parties especially for the performance of some action. Deed of covenant a legal document which records the obligation of one individual to pay a specified sum to another for a specified number of years

In the Hebrew, the word was “berith” which is derived from a word meaning to cut, indicating that covenants often involved the shedding of blood. *Gen 15:4 And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir. Gen 15:5 And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. Gen 15:6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.*

The Greek word for covenant is “diatheke” meaning an agreement, a will or a testament, hence the Old Testament and the New Testament.

In the Bible, there are symbols and signs associated with covenant. These are visible reminders or tokens of the agreement. We may view wedding rings as a symbol of the marriage agreement.

- Gen 9:13 I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.

- Lev 2:13 And every oblation of thy meat offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat offering: with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt.
- Rom 4:11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that *righteousness might be imputed unto them also:*

All of these signs were reminders to God's people of specific agreements. There was one very important covenant that related to God's law. *Exo 24:3 And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do. Exo 24:4 And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel.*

It is this covenant that we generally call the Old Covenant or Old Testament. The Bible is sometimes referred to as the Old and New Testament but strictly speaking, these terms refer to the specific legal agreements that God made with His people.

We are told here that the First Covenant, the Old Testament law was not without its faults. It was flawed and required replacing with a new agreement. Why? We shall look into this. It is an important issue because there are many people in the world who still hang on to the Old Covenant.

Covenants 2

Heb 8:6 But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. Heb 8:7 For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. Heb 8:8 For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah:

We are told here that the First Covenant, the Old Testament law was not without its faults. It was flawed and required replacing with a new agreement. Why?

1. **The law of Moses made allowances for man's hardness.** *Mat 19:8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.* The law was in some sense a devaluation of the absolute meaning of the commands.
2. **Sinful man was incapable of keeping the law.** *Joh 7:19 Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law? Rom 7:9 For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.*
3. **The nature of man was incompatible with the law.** *Heb 10:16 This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I*

write them; Eze 36:26 A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.

4. **The Old covenant never satisfied the conscience and therefore guilt before the law was always present.** *Heb 10:2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.*
5. **The law was itself a shadow.** *Heb 10:1 For the law having a shadow of good things to come, The reality was Christ. Col 2:17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ. There were some who clearly saw Christ as the culmination of this history. Joh 8:56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad. Deu 18:18 I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. Job 19:25 For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth*

As one wise man observed Jesus was Latent (hidden) in the Old Testament and Patent (obvious) in the New.

So we can see that the Old Covenant was faulty and made way for the New Covenant. Why did God introduce something that would be replaced and not go straight for the real thing? I think that this is one of the great distinctives of Christianity. History introduces Christ through the “Law”. He doesn’t roll up on the door step unannounced like other religious cult leaders. He is a long time coming and he has a pedigree. Perhaps we know more about Christ because of this introduction.

Covenants 3

Heb 8:10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

The New Covenant is about hearts and minds but just what are the “heart” and the “mind”? Let us look at the term “heart”. I use a very simple method to find out the meaning of a word in the Bible. I see how the word is used in its context

2Sa 24:10 And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly. This suggests that the heart is associated with guilt and conscience.

As the word is used many times (765 times) I have gone through all the uses because the word “heart” may be used slightly differently in another context.

Gen 42:28 And he said unto his brethren, My money is restored; and, lo, it is even in my sack: and their heart failed them, and they were afraid, saying one to another, What is this that God hath done unto us? Here we have a heart attack, the heart failure of fear.

So then what can we find out about the heart, what other aspects of it are there?

The heart in the physical is the organ that drives the blood around the body and is in a sense the fountain of life. In the spiritual sense it is a manifestation of aspects of life such as fear, anguish, joy, holiness, gentleness etc. The heart is a term that is used to describe aspects of our conscious being.

Pro 4:23 Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. Mat 15:19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:

The heart I suppose can be viewed as what we are in our person. In that person what we are is written incorrectly and needs rewriting. *Heb 10:16 This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them;* All of what we are is corrupt. *Jer 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*

This is what theologians call “The Total Depravity” of man. Man is fundamentally flawed through sin. He may even manifest acts of kindness and goodness, humanity and sacrifice, yet God still sees him as flawed. *Rom 3:12 They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*

Men find it hard to acknowledge this fact and it is a stumbling block. We all think we are right. But it's not what we think; its what God thinks that counts.

Covenants 4

Heb 8:10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

The heart we suggested can be viewed as what we are in our person or personality, the core or heart of our being. We now look at the mind. There are a number of words translated “mind”, but for consistency we shall examine the Greek word used here “διάνοια” and its root “νοῦς”.

You may have heard of the word dianoia or dianetics used in the pseudo science of Scientology. The basic teaching behind Scientology takes a somewhat gnostic view, that human beings are immortal spirits trapped in material bodies. Through scientological processes, engrams or negative sense perceptions are stored in the "reactive mind," a concept loosely akin to Freud's subconscious mind. Mental illnesses and disease are held to be the by-products of the reactive mind acting on these stored traumas. According to Scientology these engrams are 'cleared' through the use of Dianetics (sometimes referred to as 'tech,' for technology). This clearing process is conducted via the use of audits - question and answer sessions designed to pinpoint and deactivate the engrams. These

audits serve as a sort of confessional, therapy session, and karma meditation all rolled together, with mixed results. Scientologists move through several 'levels' within the organization, aspiring to be completely 'clear' at the uppermost level. In their concept, the mind is memory.

The word *nous* you may also have heard used in the context "he doesn't have much *nous*" meaning "he doesn't have much common sense".

I think that we could substitute two words for mind in the context of the verses we have looked at and maintain the sense of the passages. They are "understanding" and "reason".

The mind is the information processing part of our being. It relates to our thinking, how we put information together that will eventually be seen in the actions of our heart. To use a rather crude analogy, the mind is like the central processor in the computer and the heart is the programs that the processor manipulates. We need a new processor. *Rom 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

How does this come about? It comes about by the process of admonishing or as the Greek word is nouthesis. Nouthetic counselling. Putting each other in mind of what is right.

Rom 15:14 And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another. 1Th 5:12 And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; 2 Th 3:15 Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

Covenants 5

Heb 8:10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

Because God has to write His law into OUR heart and mind we must admit that it cannot be there by creation. Man is lawless or without the law of God. Man at creation did not know good or evil. *Gen 3:5 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.* One might say that he was naïve.

Man was not created with an intuitive knowledge of law and right and wrong. He was under instruction in the garden and forbidden the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (the law). I would assume that his relationship with his Father/Creator would have opened up the law to him, however the devil encouraged him to find the law without God.

This is very much the system that men operate under today. Men do not seek to find their laws or codes of conduct from God. They do not seek His word to find their duty. *2Ti 4:3 For the time will*

come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; In other words men will believe whatever suits them.

We are a product of nurture. *Deu 6:7 And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up..... Isa 53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.* Our conscience, that faculty that accuses us or excuses us is a result of what it is fed. *Heb 10:22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.* It needs exercise. *Act 24:16 And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.*

Although man gained a knowledge of good and evil when he partook of the forbidden fruit, the separation from God meant that the law in him was unguided and so he could not act upon that law to do the will of God. *Rom 3:10 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: Mar 10:18 And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.*

The devil can quote scripture so the fact that we know the words of the law does not necessarily produce any lasting benefit to us. We need to know the law from God's perspective. *Psa 32:8 I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.*

Many of the things that we would think are right may not be the will of God. *Mat 16:23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.*

When God says "I will be to them a God and they shall be to me a people": It is not just about law, it is about a relationship. It is about growing to understand life, God's plans and purposes from His perspective.

The Kingdom

Heb 8:11 And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.

The verses that we have been studying are a quotation from the Older Testament, so the Jews were not unfamiliar with this prophecy of the kingdom. *Jer 31:33 But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. Jer 31:34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*

It is strange to think that there were many times in the history of Israel when they completely lost the word of God. For example in the days of Josiah (2 Kings 22) the "Bible" had disappeared. It is also true that the Bible was known by the educated elite, the scribes and the priests and only second

hand by the people. Hence in the kingdom God's knowledge would be freely available. *Isa 11:9 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.*

What does it mean "they shall not teach every man his neighbour"? Does it mean that God will give us His knowledge without any effort on our part? Other verses might suggest this. *1Jo 2:20 But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. 1Jo 2:27 But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.*

So why does God put teachers in the church? *Eph 4:11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;* I think that this difficulty is solved if we rightly see that the teachers in the church are God's spokespersons. It is not so much the teacher teaching but God teaching through the teachers.

Much of our teaching today if we look at the Christian book market is about self. "101 Makeover Minutes". This is the everything guide to looking good from the inside out. Author Tammy Bennett draws from her experience in fashion, modelling and ministry to present women with a deeper, godly sense of self, beauty and identity. Her Christianity is self-indulgent.

The verse before us is about God and knowing God. If we know God we shall know ourselves. Theology is the science of God. If theology seems a dry and dull subject to you go away and pray for the Lord to open your heart to the enjoyment of His person.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism was completed in 1647 by the Westminster Assembly and continues to serve as part of the doctrinal standards of many Presbyterian churches. The first question famously asks: Question. What is the chief end of man? Answer. Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

If Christianity is becoming less effective it is because it is more about man and less about God. *Joh 12:32 And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.*

Divine Amnesia

Heb 8:12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

I have called this chapter "Divine amnesia" or "Divine forgetfulness". God does not keep a record of His children's sins so when the books are opened they do not contain a record of your sins. Forgiven sins are erased sins. For those whose names are written in the book of Life there is no record of sin. *Rev 20:15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*

There are some who see this Divine forgiveness as an excuse to sin and play down its teaching. They feel that if we emphasise this doctrine people will lead a careless life. To the contrary it should lead

us to a balanced life. Walking with Christ is like walking in a storm under an umbrella. We are covered from the elements but are continually lashed by them. *1Jo 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*

However, we should realise that there is also a book of Works and we are accountable for that, just as the men were called to account to their Master for the use of their talents. *Rev 20:12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.*

Christians will see their works judged but not their sin. *1Co 3:13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.*

The Greek word for remember is μνήμη which has the idea of fixture in the mind or of mental grasp; to bear in mind, that is recollect, be mindful, remember, come (have) in remembrance. The word amnesia is derived from this and hence we may say that God has amnesia when it comes to the sins of the Saints.

I know it is true for me that there are many things in my life that I would rather forget and I am not proud of many things that I have done. *Psa 130:3 If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?* The devil would use these against us to constantly undermine the work of Christ and His forgiveness. The devil will continue to remind us “remember when you did that?” He makes us walk back to the Cross in doubt rather than forward to the Kingdom. He makes us question the effectiveness of the death of Christ by asking if those sins were dealt with.

Out of that darkness we should hear these words, “I will forget their sins”. “What sins” we should say to the devil? “You tell me one sin that has not been forgiven”.

If we understand this great truth we shall lose our guilt of sin. William Cowper the hymn writer was suicidal as he wrestled with his guilt and his deliverance spawned one of the greatest hymns of all times: “There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel’s veins; And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.”

We are washed from sin, cleansed from guilt and God forgets our sins.

Grace

Heb 8:12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

God remembers our sins no more. Why, because it is an act of mercy. What is mercy? Well, some people confuse two words, grace and mercy but they are different. *Gen 19:19 Behold now, thy*

servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast shewed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die:

Grace is God's kindness and it has no limitations. *Mat 5:45 for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.* People often use the term "Common Grace" to describe this aspect of God's character. Mercy is a different Divine attribute. Mercy is exercised at God's own pleasure or discretion.

Rom 9:15 For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth but of God that sheweth mercy. Read Romans Chapter 9. Mercy and Pity are not deserved and cannot be bought. The Good Samaritan was merciful even though he did not have to help but in doing so he defined the great quality of a neighbour. *Luk 10:37 And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.* A neighbour is merciful.

You see when man sinned God was under no moral obligation to save man. He could wipe the slate clean and start again but He did not. As we sin in our lives He could say, "That is enough, depart from me". In forgiving us and showing us this unmerited, undeserved favour, God is displaying an attribute that would otherwise be hidden.

Yet another great truth is that not all receive mercy. *Rom 9:18 Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.* You cannot complain for you have received mercy, for those who haven't it is the act of a Sovereign King. Yet how many cry for mercy in this generation? They will celebrate the New Year with fireworks but show little such exuberance for the arrival of Christ.

God's mercy to those He shows it to is not constrained or limited. As Shakespeare observed, "The quality of mercy is not strain'd, It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest; It blesseth him that gives and him that takes": Disguised as a doctor of law Portia has come to rescue Antonio, the merchant of Venice. Antonio had foolishly signed a bond granting the usurer Shylock a "pound of flesh" if he defaulted on the loan he was forced to seek.

Portia doesn't appeal at first to legal technicalities (which is the only way she will force Shylock to submit) but delivers a Christian moral. When Shylock demands to know why he "must" be merciful, Portia replies that compulsion is precisely contrary to the spirit of mercy, which is not "strained" (forced).

Only because mercy is voluntary, because it mitigates the compulsions of the literal law, is it true mercy, which drops gently like heaven's rain, a natural and gracious quality rather than a legal one. God had no obligation to us yet in His mercy He showed it.

A new Covenant

Heb 8:13 In that he saith, a new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

It is set against the old. *Heb 8:8 For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah:*

The words “Waxeth old” is where we get the word geriatric from. Greek γηράσκω. When Christ comes the Old Covenant has done its work and becomes old. It reminded me of the description of aging in Ecclesiastes chapter 12. It describes the decline in faculties and the failure in senses so opposite to the vigour of youth.

The word “New”, Greek καίνος, means fresh. It does not mean new in the sense of young, for then they would have used νέος. The New Covenant had as it were been waiting in the wings ready to appear once the Old was removed it was not an afterthought. There is almost a feeling of violent removal because the word for vanish away means to throttle. The Old Covenant, the Old agreement is strangled.

So central to the Christian writings is the New Covenant that the scriptures, that is, the books are called the New Testament or New Covenant. However the New Testament is about more than a Covenant, the Covenant is the central theme. The Covenant inextricably linked to the death of Christ and the Blood of Christ. *1Co 11:25 After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.*

Heb 9:15 And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. This is a difficult verse but we shall come to it shortly.

There is also another feature of the New Covenant. *2Co 3:6 Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.* The Covenant has both its signs and seals (blood/Baptism, circumcision/Sabbath etc) and its code of conduct. Here the New Covenant speaks of its letters. The letter Greek γραμμα, destroys but the spirit πνευμα, makes alive. The New Covenant is Pneumatic! Relating to Air?

Herein is the difference between the Old and the New. The Old was inflexible. It did not take into account circumstances, for example if you had a car crash in which you caused the loss of a limb you could under the Old law have your limb removed. The letter of the law was thus destructive and depressing, it was hard and unyielding. It is as if the law was there for its own sake not for the benefit of the community.

I know many “Christians” who still cling to that old law. You will see in them a lack of flexibility, a hardness of heart, a lack of true joy, a lack of love to the sinner and the inability to truly forgive.

They are still bound by the Old law. However, Paul says that, Rom 8:2 *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.*

Those who are truly under the New Covenant will also experience spiritual freedom.

Rules for Worship

Heb 9:1 Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary.
AV Heb 9:1 The first promise that was made included rules for worship and a tent for worship here on earth. CEV

Now we examine the concept established in the Older Testament that there were “Rules for worship”. I don’t think that many Christians have ever thought about how they should worship the Lord. They just fall into the nearest church or go with those who led them to Christ to their church. It is an assumption that however you worship is acceptable! If you are critical of someone’s worship you are labelled “judgemental”, which really means “you have no right to criticise me”. The result is that we are becoming more and more accepting of the televangelist, clappy happy, singathon, money focused, anything goes services.

How you worship may define your denomination, your affiliation but it doesn’t make it right in the eyes of God and it doesn’t make it acceptable. God does not have to show a response that what you are doing is right or wrong especially if you have the rule book in front of you. In Genesis 4 we read of the first church service and there were two different approaches and two different outcomes. There was the arable approach and the livestock approach. The brothers both brought of the fruit of their labours and one was accepted and one rejected. Why?

I believe that there were already rules in place about how to worship God. I do not think that these brothers had to suck it and see as an approach to worship. Today I will offer this and see if it works? In other words we are adopting an inductive approach to worship.

So how do I know that the brothers had rules of worship? The Bible says so! *Heb 11:4 By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous,* Where does faith come from? *Rom 10:17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

So what we see in this first act of worship is that one man followed the rules and the other didn’t. Both clearly had a desire to worship but one wanted to worship on his own terms and the other on God’s terms. In fact Abel’s detail was such that he even offered the fat to His God. *Gen 4:4 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof.* Fat was the Lord’s portion and not given to men. *Lev 3:16 And the priest shall burn them upon the altar: it is the food of the offering made by fire for a sweet savour:* All the fat is the Lord’s.

The Jews even today in the preparation of their food pay strict (kosher) observance of the way they remove certain items from meat. Kosher is a Hebrew word meaning fit or right. When we call something Kosher, we mean that it is a genuine article. So we can say that Abel’s worship was truly

kosher but that Cain's was not. How many people today are worshipping the way of Cain, giving God what they feel is right rather than what He wants? We shall continue this subject but perhaps you will all give it some serious thought. You may wish to define the elements of true worship.

Divine Worship

Heb 9:1 Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary.
AV Heb 9:1 The first promise that was made included rules for worship and a tent for worship here on earth. CEV

We have over the past weeks discussed the nature of worship in the New Testament. In the Old Testament worship concentrated on sacrifice. *Gen 22:5 And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you. Exo 24:1 And he said unto Moses, Come up unto the LORD, thou, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship ye afar off.*

Sacrifice is offered as an exercise in peacemaking with God. *Gen 8:21 And Jehovah smelled the sweet odour.* We also have a theological term to describe the act, substitutionary atonement. Man cannot just take it upon himself to worship God without sacrifice. There are terms and conditions that God has laid out for friendship. You cannot just walk in and say I want to be your friend on my terms. God doesn't hang around on Sundays in the hope that someone will roll up for worship and He is ready to take whatever they give. It doesn't work that way.

There was also in some men such a desire for that friendship that they would sacrifice their most precious possession to obtain it as was with Abraham. *Mat 13:44 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.*

Initially sacrifice was undertaken by the heads of families. *Job 1:5 And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.*

Job sanctified his family. In those far off days there was no particular nation that had a unique claim to God. When God set apart the sons of Jacob to found the nation of Israel true religion contracted into a specific elect race. Within that nation race in order to focus worship God set up a particular group of individuals to manage and coordinate worship. These were the Levites.

Levi's mother was Leah, Rachel's sister and his two brothers were Reuben and Simeon. *Gen 29:32 And Leah conceived, and bare a son, and she called his name Reuben: for she said, Surely the LORD hath looked upon my affliction; now therefore my husband will love me. Gen 29:33 And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Because the LORD hath heard that I was hated, he hath*

therefore given me this son also: and she called his name Simeon. Gen 29:34 And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Now this time will my husband be joined unto me, because I have born him three sons: therefore was his name called Levi.

Why we might ask did God choose Levi to head up the priesthood? *Gen 49:5 Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations.* Their own father said this of them and he was not a particularly transparent character! Why not Reuben who at least objected to Joseph's murder?

Why not Joseph's line in Manasseh and Ephraim, why not David's line in Judah? There must be some significance in the choice of Levi? In Gen 34 we see the character of the brothers revealed. *Gen 34:25 And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males. Gen 34:30 And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house.*

The Levitical law and ordinances were in a large measure cruel. There was little grace because it ministered to hard hearts. *Mat 19:8 He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.* Let us not forget that Moses also was a Levite. *Exo 2:1 And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi. Exo 2:2 And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months.*

Under the law there was little room for freedom of conscience. Conscience is not a word in great use in the Old Testament. (the word "conscience" is not used at all in the KJV but "heart" takes its place). The law was laid out in hard stone like a look up table. It required little thought. If you committed such and such you had to do this and that. There was no flexibility.

Depending on your sin, the tariff for sacrifice was quite clear. I would say that there was probably little difference between the Jewish worship and Radical Islam living under the Sharia laws, but this is said by way of illustrating the hardness of law.

What the New Testament does is in a large measure restore man to his original (fallible) state at creation. Under this new state, also called the New Birth or born again, freedoms are restored. Man is no more governed by external codes written on stone. The heart is restored. *2Co 3:3 Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.* Conscience is revived *Rom 13:5 Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.*

The difference between worship in the New Testament and worship in the Old Testament could not be more marked. In the Old Testament it was rigidly ordered and prescribed. It was regulated

strictly by a full time and fully paid elite, the Levites. What was done week in and week out could not be changed.

As we have seen the New Testament has no prescription for worship. It is totally free provided that it is conducted in an orderly manner. This perhaps explains the huge variation in religious expression as witnessed by the various denominations.

As we progress through the 9th Chapter of Hebrews we shall see just what brought about this shift in religious expression.

Yom Kippur/Atonement Day

Only the high priest could go into the second part of the tent and he went in only once a year. *Heb 9:7 But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people:* Each time he carried blood to offer for his sins and for any sins that the people had committed without meaning to.

Lev 23:27 Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD.

This day is also called in Hebrew “the day of covering” כְּפָרֵי י֥ם, Yom Kippur. It literally means the day of covering. The כְּפָרָה Capporet is the name of the mercyseat, the covering of the Ark of the Covenant.

Some may remember that on October 6th 1973 the Arab nations took advantage of this holiday to attack Israel. The 7th Month corresponds to our October, the first Month being in April (Nisan), the month of the Crucifixion. The Jewish Civil New Year begins with Rosh Hashanah, the first of Tishri, the start of the 7th Month. The Jewish calendar is designed around its major festivals, Passover and Rosh Hashanah. Rosh Hashanah is the beginning of the secular year and comes in the autumn, while Passover is the beginning of the Religious year and comes in the Spring. While it may seem confusing to have two beginnings of the year it is no different from what happens today in the United Kingdom where the school year begins in the ninth month, September. There are even special calendars for students based on this school year.

The account of Yom Kippur can be read in the sixteenth chapter of Leviticus. This was the only day of the year that the Holy of Holies was entered and it started with the High Priest making a sacrifice for himself. *Lev 16:3 Thus shall Aaron come into the holy place: with a young bullock for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering.* This was followed by a sacrifice for the congregation of Israel. *Lev 16:5 And he shall take of the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering.*

They cast lots on the two goats, one would be killed and the other would be led into the Wilderness. The Scapegoat is the one that is made to bear the blame of others, a live goat over whose head Aaron confessed all the sins of the children of Israel. The goat symbolically bearing their sins was

then sent into the wilderness. The goat “Azazel” has been associated in myth with the devil and perhaps explains why satan is sometimes shown as a goat. However the truth is that it is symbolic of Christ bearing our sins away.

Following the sacrifices the priest made atonement for the sanctuary. *Lev 16:16 And he shall make an atonement for the holy place*, Why? Because it taught the people that not only were they sinful, but that they had also polluted the place of God’s meeting with them.

Lev 16:30 For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD. Lev 16:31 It shall be a sabbath of rest unto you, and ye shall afflict your souls, by a statute for ever. The day was a day of personal consideration of sin and its effects over the past year.

Conscience

Heb 9:8 The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first Tabernacle was yet standing: Heb 9:9 Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience;

We have studied the Day of Atonement which was a religious high point in the Jewish Year. What was its significance? The significance we are taught by the Holy Spirit is a lesson in perfection. Note that the Holy Ghost signified this in the Old Testament. The Tabernacle was the work of the Spirit. *Exo 35:31 And he hath filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship;*

The Holy of Holies was accessed only once a year. As long as the first Tabernacle stood access was limited. This shows that under the Old Testament communion with God was extremely limited as opposed to the New Testament which is totally open. Significantly the gospels record that this opening coincided with the death of Christ. *Mar 15:37 And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. And the veil of the Temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.*

The limiting factor in all of this was the conscience. The conscience of the Old Testament believer was not perfect (Greek τελειωσαι) or complete. The service or ritual did not remove the guilt of the offences. Coming to terms with sins is quite hard. We often say these days that people find it hard to forgive themselves. In a sense this was the problem in the Old Testament.

Conscience is referred to many times including:

Joh 8:9 And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience..... Act 24:16 And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men. Rom 13:5 Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake..... 1Co 8:7 Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled..... 1Co 10:25 Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake:..... 1Ti 1:19 Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made

shipwreck:..... 1Ti 4:2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;..... Tit 1:15 Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled..... Heb 10:22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water

So what is the conscience? It is something that makes us feel guilty, something that can be exercised, something that can be strong or weak, something that can be defiled, something that can be good or evil or imperfect, something that can be burned out and something that can be cleansed.

The Perfect Tabernacle

Heb 9:11 But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect Tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Heb 9:12 Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

We are now drawn to the person of Christ who is the High Priest of good things to come. For us in Christ there is a future prospect that things will be better there is no such prospect for the wicked.

This Christ also comes with a greater and more perfect Tabernacle. The term Tabernacle is often applied to our mortal bodies. *2Pe 1:14 Knowing that shortly I must put off this my Tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. 2Co 5:1 For we know that if our earthly house of this Tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.* This delightful euphemism reminds us that our body is a cloak or temporary habitation for the eternal soul. How comforting to know that we live on.

Likewise the Tabernacle in the wilderness was also a temporary feature. *Act 7:44 Our fathers had the Tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen. Act 7:44 Our fathers had the Tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen.* This Tabernacle as we saw was patterned after something in Heaven. *Heb 8:5 Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the Tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.*

Just what did Moses see? He saw Christ the true Tabernacle. *Heb 8:2 A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true Tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. Joh 1:14 Καὶ ὁ Λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν.* This was the expectation of the prophets. *Act 15:16 After this I will return, and will build again the Tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up.*

The Temple which was patterned on the Tabernacle also mirrored the person of Christ. *Joh 2:19 Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up. In this passage, Christ shows His ownership and succession to the Jewish Temple.*

When Christ returns it marks the coming of the New Jerusalem and the New City of God. *Rev 21:3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the Tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.*

We finally see what Moses had glimpsed all those long centuries before. A glorious heaven in which there were no tears, wars or sorrows. Such glory shone from Moses face, like horns or rays of the sun and he covered his head. *2Co 3:13 And not as Moses, which put a vail over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished:* This may explain the tradition of Jews for wearing a Kippah (skull cap). But for us there is no covering, we see Him face to face.

Power in the Blood 1

Heb 9:12 Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. Heb 9:13 For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: Heb 9:14 How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

This verse explains a central theme of the Christian church, the blood of Christ.

Sacrifices are common to many ancient religions all over the world from South America to Europe and Asia. This probably confirms the common ancestry of humanity. Why did men sacrifice? We read of Abel and Cain's sacrifice but where did they get it from? *Gen 4:3 And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. Gen 4:4 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering:*

The first sacrifice was made by God to cover the shame of Adam. *Gen 3:21 Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.* Sacrifice has at its root the removal of guilt, appeasement of an offended deity and a request for blessing. I think that God was showing Adam how to remain in a relationship with Himself and that Abel and Cain were brought up to do this. Cain followed his earthly fathers' sacrifice (fig leaves) and Abel his heavenly Fathers' sacrifice.

The way of Cain has been adopted widely over history. The important element in the sacrifice is blood because it represented the life. *Lev 17:11 For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.* It was for this reason that blood was sacred. *Lev 17:10 And whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, that eateth any manner of blood; I will even set my face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among his people.*

This has led to a distinctive of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Is it wrong to sustain life by administering a transfusion of blood or plasma or red cells or others of the component parts of the blood? Yes! The prohibition includes "any blood at all" (Blood, Medicine and the Law of God, 1961, pp. 13, 14).

Clearly, blood transfusions were not the issue at the time. Neither was it in the New Testament. Act 15:29 *That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well.*

God taught us to respect blood because it represented the life that He gave to this world. Joh 6:51 *I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.* All bloods were forbidden that we would focus on this blood alone, the blood of Christ. It is the only blood that God has allowed mankind to drink.

Joh 6:56 *He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.* This is the only way to remove the conscience of sin. The past cannot be changed but we do not have to live with the guilt of our evil deeds. To do that is to deny the power of the blood of Christ.

1Jo 1:7 *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*

Power in the Blood 2

Heb 9:15 *And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive (**λάθωσιν**) the promise of eternal inheritance.*

Let us remind ourselves that the Old Testament sacrifices did not remove guilt and that it required a new and better sacrifice to do that. It is obvious that Christ died for the Christians in the New Testament but this verse is saying something more. It is saying that Christ died to redeem men from transgressions committed under the Old Testament. It is saying that the true Jews of the Old Testament were saved in exactly the same manner as we by the blood of Christ. 1Co 15:22 *For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.*

How could they in the Old Testament be saved when Christ had not yet died in the sequence of history? So secure is the purpose of God, so immovable His decree that there was nothing that could have altered the certainty of the death and resurrection of His son. Rev 13:8 *And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*

This does not mean that Jesus actually was crucified before creation but that His death was a certainty before creation. Let us also remind ourselves why the world was made: Col 1:16 *For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:*

I imagine that many in the Old Testament understood the vision of Abraham who looked to the “seed” for their inheritance and understood that there would be a deliverer. *Gal 3:16 Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.*

The Old Testament guilt came because of the inadequacy of the sacrifice. It did not have the power as the hymn writer observed: “*Would you be whiter, much whiter than snow? There's power in the blood, power in the blood; Sin stains are lost in its life giving flow. There's wonderful power in the blood*”.

So while the Old Testament sacrifices contended with the ritual pollutions, the ingrained sins remained un-removed. They must have known in their hearts that they needed a Saviour beyond animals, so they clung to the promise of their God. *Isa 43:11 I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour.* Until such time as their God revealed Himself in the Flesh. *Joh 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*

We have a theological term to describe how the Jews “might receive” this salvation. It is called proleptic justification. It means that it is taken or received before the event occurred. It might also explain the difficult verse in Peter. *1Pe 3:18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;* Those prisoners of conscience in the Old Testament could only be released by Christ.

Death

Heb 9:16 For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. KJV..... Heb 9:16 For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. CEV

A Will often known as a Last Will and Testament is one of the most important documents that you will ever write or be involved in writing. It is likely to be the piece of paper that has the most influence on the way your affairs are handled after your death. The basic purpose of a Will is to outline the intentions of the writer with regard to their affairs after their death.

Now this raises a question. How or in what sense does God die? God is “I am” and “The living God”. To answer this we have to define death. Death is our enemy not our friend. *1Co 15:26 The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.* It pursues us to our grave. We spend fortunes fighting death, trying to live longer...for what?

We have death because we sinned and sin. *Rom 5:17 For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; and it is the punishment for sin.* Death is King. *Rom 6:23 For the wages of sin is death; but the*

gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. God pays people back and he gives them their wages for sin, death. God gives man death. *Deu 30:19 I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life,*

In the beginning it was death as separation from God in the garden. It matured into eternal separation after death in hell. Hence there is a first and a second death. *Rev 20:6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.* The first resurrection I take to be the new birth. *1Jo 3:14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. That has happened. Eph 2:1 And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;*

Now death for humans is primarily a transition. It is passing from this world to the next. Conscious existence never ceases. Death is not annihilation or unconsciousness. Moses and Elijah were not unconscious on the mount of transfiguration. *Luk 9:30 And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias:* It was also quite clear from their appearance who they were. We tend to view death as the cessation of life because from our perspective all that the person ever was dissolves into nothing. What has dissolved however is not me but my body.

So in what sense does God “die”? God dies in that He takes upon Himself our death, the punishment for our sin. He takes us to the cross with Himself. *Rom 6:6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.* In that sense He tastes death. He walks us through death.

Heb 2:9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

Forgiveness

Heb 9:22 And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. (ἀφεσίς aphesis freedom; (figuratively) pardon: - deliverance, forgiveness, liberty, remission.)

Forgiveness is not straightforward. At some stage it must involve the blood of Christ because without that there is no forgiveness. We have first though to examine the attitude of heart. When Jesus utters the words on the cross what was he doing? *Luk 23:34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.* Were they forgiven all their sins? Within the context of the event Jesus was not holding the men to account for what they did to Him. although He was within His rights to do so. Yet what those men did was wicked in putting an innocent man to death. *Deu 19:10 That innocent blood be not shed in thy land, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance, and so blood be upon thee.* Would God punish them?

Forgiveness is primarily an attitude. *Mat 6:14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:* We must ask if we are forgiving or if we hold onto the evil that is done against us? Do we bear grudges? One reason that we carry grudges is that we do not deal with the

issues. We moan to others and everybody but the person concerned. It just makes us suffer more. Quote: "I've had a few arguments with people, but I never carry a grudge. You know why? While you're carrying a grudge, they're out dancing." - Buddy Hackett. The solution is action. *Luk 17:3 Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.* It is not an option whether you do it. It is a duty and it must be genuine. *Mat 18:35 So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.*

But suppose the person you confront fails to repent? Can he be forgiven? *Luk 17:4 And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.* Well the issues remain unresolved, you cannot have an honest relationship with the individual but you would only do yourself harm to keep dragging the issue about with you.

Intermediate forgiveness (if I may coin this term to describe human forgiveness) requires repentance and confession on the part of the offender and release on the part of the offended. *Act 7:60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.*

Intermediate forgiveness is not binding on God. Blood cries for vengeance. *Rev 6:10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?* Absolute forgiveness or Divine Forgiveness requires turning to Christ. *1Jo 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

Heaven

Heb 9:23 These things are only copies of what is in heaven, and so they had to be made holy by these ceremonies. But the real things in heaven must be made holy by something better. Heb 9:24 This is why Christ did not go into a tent that had been made by humans and was only a copy of the real one. Instead, he went into heaven and is now there with God to help us. CEV

We come to the revelation of another great mystery, that of Heaven. We have seen that the Tabernacle, the tent in the wilderness, was patterned upon something out of this world. *Heb 8:5 Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the Tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.* We are told here that it was patterned on something in heaven.

What is heaven? In the Older Testament Heaven (Shamayim) refers to the expanse (firmament) above the earth. *Gen 1:8 And God called the firmament Heaven.* The heavens extend to the stars and beyond. *Gen 1:17 And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth.* Heaven could be also used to describe the sky or the atmosphere.

Heaven is viewed as the abode of God. *1Ki 8:39 Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place.* It is a place set in opposition to the earth. The idea as heaven as the abode of the righteous is not clearly revealed in the Old Testament writings although it does not mean that it was not understood.

The New Testament brings a clearer understanding of heaven with the revelation of Christ and the kingdom of heaven. *Mat 3:2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* The Greek word for heaven is ouranos (Uranus) from the god of the sky the husband of Gaia, the earth. This word is given a much deeper meaning as it is sanctified in scripture.

Heaven is now seen through the eyes of Christ and described through many parables...the kingdom of heaven is like.. *Mat 13:31 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Mat 13:32 Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.* *Mat 13:33 Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.* You will also notice that Matthew is the only writer using the term “Kingdom of Heaven” whereas other writers use (interchangeably) the Kingdom of God.

The relationship that Christ creates is one that brings us into heaven itself. *Eph 2:6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.* The process whereby God forgives us in Christ also elevates us to another realm. It takes us beyond mortality and corruption to a higher everlasting kingdom. This place is also called paradise. *Rev 2:7 To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.* *Luk 23:43 To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.* *2Co 12:4 How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.*

This imagery takes us back to the original creation and the garden of God. That too we must acknowledge was also a figure of the heavenly. The whole creation, the heaven and the earth, the garden of Eden, not just the Tabernacle, were all expressions of the invisible realm of God.

I suppose that the great lesson of Creation is that because of the very nature of man we can never have heaven on Earth and any attempt to create it is doomed to failure. True Heaven only comes with Christ.

Putting Away Sin

Heb 9:25 Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; *Heb 9:26 For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*

Jesus put away sin. What is sin? Sin is falling short of God's standards or missing the mark. *Jdg 20:16 Among all this people there were seven hundred chosen men lefthanded; every one could sling stones*

at an hair breadth, and not miss (Heb: Sin). Rom 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; We have shortcomings.

We talk about people having “shortcomings” and in a tolerant society we feel that it is gracious to overlook them. Why doesn’t God do the same? We may have been formed in His image but we do not have His mind. *Isa 55:8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.*

In our ministry some time ago we looked at addictions and saw that the moment a person introduces the language of sickness and pathology they are abdicating any semblance of personal responsibility. 'Addiction' is a permit to do anything they enjoy to any excess, regardless of harm to self or anyone else with unabashed impunity. The tolerant society is an invention of man. Can you imagine how long life on earth would exist if our bodies allowed or tolerated every bacteria, germ and virus free access? God has put laws of intolerance in our very structure to enable us to survive. It is a lesson in sin.

We see the consequences upon social order when we tolerate sin and how that society rapidly declines. *Pro 14:34 Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.* Revivals come when men realise how far they have fallen and want to get right with God. In his monumental work, Decline and fall of the Roman Empire, Edward Gibbons listed the following key factors in the decline of Rome.

- The rapid increase of divorce; the undermining of dignity and sanctity of the home, which is the basis of human society.
- Higher and higher taxes and the spending of public money for free bread and circuses for the populace.
- The mad craze for pleasure; sports becoming every year more exciting and more brutal.
- The building of gigantic armaments when the real enemy was within: the decadence of the people.
- The decay of religion, faith fading into mere form, losing touch with life and becoming impotent to guide the people.

The word sin occurs over 380 times in the Bible. That is too many times to ignore. To help us remember sins God gave us ten fingers and ten basic principles to guide our lives (Ex 20). We have rejected these rules for life but in doing so we have not put away the sins associated with them. Only Christ does that.

The Centrality of Christ’s Forgiveness

Heb 9:28 So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation. KJV Heb 9:28 So Christ died only once to take away the sins of many people. But when he comes again, it will not be to take away sin. He will come to save everyone who is waiting for him. CEV

One of the most influential books that I have read (1976) apart from the Bible was Rousas Rushdoony's "Institutes of Biblical Law". As a relatively young Christian the book opened up the possibilities for a world under God's dominion or law. It seemed to make Christianity relevant and up to date by appealing for a reintroduction of the Biblical laws as a means of social change.

The early 1970's was a time when social changes were afoot. The liberalisation of the 1960's had permeated the churches with the "Jesus" movement and "God loves you". The Baptist church's Michael Taylor used the platform of the annual Baptist Union assembly in 1971 to deny the deity of Christ and no discipline was exercised. Liberalism and social decline helped to focus the mind. With fuel crisis and 3 day weeks, shortages in shops, the end was nigh or was it?

The idea that it was possible for Christians to exercise social change was an intriguing and exciting idea. It was a movement known as Christian Reconstruction or the Dominion movement. Christians could take over the government and introduce a new Christian order. The reality was that the liberalism continued into the much different and more prosperous 1980's. It all happened without Christianity.

The Christian reconstruction movement as it became known had more success in America. In "A Christian Manifesto" Francis Schaeffer's argument is that the United States began as a nation rooted in Biblical principles. Then as society became more pluralistic advocates of a new philosophy of secular humanism gradually came to dominate the society. Since humanists place human achievement not God at the centre of their concerns, they pushed American culture in ungodly directions, the most visible results of which included legalized abortion and the secularisation of the public schools.

Schaeffer concluded "A Christian Manifesto" with a call for Christians to use civil disobedience to restore Biblical morality. I point out in passing that civil disobedience and rebellion were never encouraged as a way to solve social problems. *Rom 13:1 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.*

Since Dominionists teach that the mission of the church goes beyond the spiritual transformation of individuals to a mandate to change society, they must change the laws of the land, elect Christians to office and seek to take dominion over our world bringing it under the Mosaic Law. We see the influence of this thinking even in those who may know little about it: James Dobson (The Christian Coalition), Pat Robertson (Promise Keepers), Charles Colson (Operation Rescue) are but a few of the evidences that Dominionist thinking is beginning to dominate the evangelical world.

What brought all of this back? It was a TV programme (Dispatches: In God's Name – a look at the growing influence of Christian fundamentalists <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2gqhIRdOxJg>).

We use the term "Fundamentalist" to describe extreme and often violent religious movements. What is the origin of the term fundamentalist? In 1909 God moved two Christian laymen to set aside a large sum of money for issuing twelve volumes that would set forth the fundamentals of the

Christian faith and which were to be sent free to ministers of the gospel, missionaries, Sunday School superintendents and others engaged in aggressive Christian work throughout the English speaking world. A committee of men who were known to be sound in the faith was chosen to have the oversight of the publication of these volumes. Rev. Dr. A.C. Dixon was the first Executive Secretary of the Committee and upon his departure for England Rev. Dr. Louis Meyer was appointed to take his place. Upon the death of Dr. Meyer the work of the Executive Secretary devolved upon R A Torrey.

The term fundamentalist derives from a series of (originally) twelve volumes entitled *The Fundamentals: A Testimony To The Truth*. Among this publication's 94 essays, 27 of them objected to higher criticism of the Bible by far the largest number addressing any one topic. The essays were written by 64 British and American conservative Protestant theologians between 1910 and 1915. Using a \$250,000 grant from Lyman Stewart, the head of the Union Oil Company of California about three million sets of these books were distributed to English-speaking Protestant church workers throughout the world.

Fundamental means relating to the foundation or base. The fundamentals or foundations of Christianity were the source of these documents. Since that date the term fundamentalist has fallen into abuse and has come to mean extremism and violent bigotry. I think that we have to revise our terms upward.

However, to return to the TV programme, it was showing a number of instances where Christians were getting involved in social issues among them homosexuality and abortion. They portrayed a vociferous and intolerant group of idealists out to change the world by politics. I felt embarrassed by some of the things that they said and by their approach. I did not feel that it honoured God but that is just my opinion. It had a lot in common with the Christian reconstruction movements.

So as I pondered this I asked myself a question. Did the early Christians in the Bible take up public causes like this, with the rulers and governors of the world? Did we find a movement to ban crucifixion as inhumane or scourging as barbaric? Did we find a movement protesting against taxation? Did we find Christians against war and a human rights movement? Did we find a movement against homosexualists? My hypothesis or theory is that they did not. Not that these are unimportant moral issues.

What we do see in the Bible is that Christians do take these issues up but in the framework of the church. They deal with their own problems but they don't try to change the world by tackling "minor" issues or getting involved in local politics. This is true in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. They are totally separate from this. Christ's kingdom is not of this world. *Joh 18:36 Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.*

If then His kingdom is not of this world what are we doing with this world's kingdom?

You might argue that God sent messengers to other Nations such as Jonah. What was Jonah's message? It was a message of imminent destruction for their wickedness. *Jon 1:2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.* Jonah was not

preaching against singular sins, abortion, adultery, idolatry, he was preaching judgement and he was sent by God. *Jon 3:4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. Jon 3:5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them.*

Israel did not undertake to evangelise the nations around them. If strangers came in to their society they had to conform. *Exo 12:49 One law shall be to him that is homeborn, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you.* The reason is obvious. Strangers bring strange gods and that would undermine society.

So then do Christians have a duty to change society and fight against social evils? The answer to this question must be yes. That is never in question for we are at war. *Eph 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.* What is at issue is the method.

Abortion is an evil deed and punishable under law. *Exo 21:22 If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. Exo 21:23 And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life.* We would expect that unless there were very extreme circumstances people who resorted to abortion as church members would be disciplined by the church, adultery and fornication likewise. *1Co 5:1 It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. 1Co 5:2 And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.* The reason that we can and should deal with these issues is: *1Co 6:3 Know ye not that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life?*

The Church regulates itself without resort to civil law. *1Co 6:1 Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?* Does it have the mandate or right to regulate the unbeliever?

The question is should we judge the unbeliever and bring him under Biblical laws for which he has no faith? What are we actually achieving when we take up the abortion issue? Are we making people believers or are we being Pharisees. *Mat 23:15 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.*

The issues underlying abortion are many for example,

- abortion for the sake of the mother's health, including her mental health
- abortion where a pregnancy is the result of a crime, such as crimes as rape, incest, or child abuse
- abortion where the child of the pregnancy would have an 'unacceptable quality of life' such as cases where the child would have
 - serious physical handicaps,
 - serious genetic problems,

- serious mental defects
- abortion for social reasons, including: poverty, mother unable to cope with a child (or another child), mother being too young to cope with a child,
- abortion as a matter of government policy: as a way of regulating population size as a way of regulating groups within a population or as a way of improving the population

Abortion is an expression of other social evils. You might stop abortion but you are still left with a tableau of other sins, crimes and social ills. It will be an interesting study to look at the downside of social reforms, for example slavery and the decline of the Negro population, child labour laws and the increase in family poverty.

You will probably find that by just tackling abortion you would create many more social problems. I do not believe that any of those "reasons" for abortion will be a common issue in a Christian church or family where Christ is Lord.

My thesis is that if you wish to change society you must preach a singular message of God's judgement and forgiveness in Jehovah Christ. Jonah's message is Paul's message. When Paul travels to Athens, he tells the Greeks and strangers... *Act 17:31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.* That is the heart of the Gospel.

During the first three centuries of the apostolic Church "reconstructing society" was never entertained. Christ clearly taught "My kingdom is not of this world". *Joh 18:36 Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.* The Bible teaches us that the world will become more corrupt in the last days.

The Church is never commanded to subdue the earth on its own, this simply will not happen until Christ returns. The Church's main responsibility is evangelism and discipleship, not political activism. Our call as believers is to change people through the Gospel of Jesus Christ not to change society through social reformation.

Keep your focus on Christ in your own life and how to introduce Him to others but beware of getting into social reform and do not feel guilty because you do not. My hypothesis or theory that the early church did not involve itself in social reform. is I believe proven from scripture.

By all means hold strong opinions based upon your faith but remember that they are a product of your faith. If you plant practices in people's lives who do not carry that same faith as you they will have no value, nay they will have the opposite effect. *Rom 14:23 for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.* Is this not at the root of Christ's saying? *Mat 23:15 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.*

Come Lord Jesus Come

Heb 9:28 So Christ died only once to take away the sins of many people. But when he comes again, it will not be to take away sin. He will come to save everyone who is waiting for him.

In the Eastern Church they developed the celebration of Christ's birth on the 25th December and a second festival on the 6th January. This second festival was to celebrate the coming of the Magi to present their gifts and reveal Christ to the nations. This perhaps is why Eastern churches give gifts on the 6th January instead of Christmas day. The feast was called Epiphany - the manifestation.

People spend hours queuing just to get a glimpse of a famous. Christ came but also comes again and the text here suggests that we should be waiting for him. *person 2Ti 4:8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (epiphany).*

Churches also developed a period in their worship (the four weeks before Christmas) which they called Advent (Latin ad' venire (to come to)). This period reminded people not just of the birth of Jesus but also His return. We might then justly call ourselves Adventists because we believe in the second coming and rightly so because the scriptures abound with teachings on it.

For example the gospels:

- *Mat 16:27 For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.*
- *Mat 23:39 For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.*
- *Mat 24:27 For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*
- *Mat 24:30 And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*
- *Mat 24:36 But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. Mat 24:37 But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Mat 24:38 For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, Mat 24:39 And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*
- *Mat 24:42 Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.*

Also the epistles

- *1Co 11:26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.*
- *1Co 15:23 But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.*
- *1Co 15:24 Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even*

the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.

• *Php 3:20 For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:*

• *1Th 4:15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. 1Th 4:16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: 1Th 4:17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. 1Th 4:18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words. 1Th 5:1 But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. 1Th 5:2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. 1Th 5:3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. 1Th 5:4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.*

It seems to me however, that we would much rather Christ came now, while we are alive than that we should die (fall asleep) and then meet Him. If he comes while we are alive, then all the problems that we would worry about leaving behind are solved. As we have observed on other occasions death is never convenient and we imagine ourselves so valuable as to be irreplaceable to those around us. We just want to hang on to life for the sake of others, so we say.

I think that this attitude sometimes puts our “Adventist” expectations on the back burner. We just do not want to face the consequences. Yet we should. We should as part of our daily prayers invoke the Kingdom...thy kingdom come. With the Native Americans we should always be able to say “Today is a good day to die”.

I think that if we truly lived up to this expectation we might get far more out of life because we would be living each day as if it were our last....and one day that will come true. Use our text to encourage your hearts. *Joh 14:1 Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. Joh 14:2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.*

The last words in the Bible are Adventist. *Rev 22:20 He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. Rev 22:21 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*

The Shadow of the Law 1

Heb 10:1 For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

If the verse before us invokes déjà vu it is because we have covered this subject already in Hebrews 9. Where scripture repeats itself we should consider that God is reinforcing a very important matter.

You will find that there are very few Christians who fully understand what is being said here and perhaps because it is difficult it is repeated.

The law as we have seen is a shadow. What law? The law of men, the law of God or the Law of Moses? In absolute terms God's law is unchangeable so I suggest that we are looking at Moses' version, the so called Law of Moses. Many people have tried to separate out the Civil and Ceremonial laws and say that we are only talking about ceremonial law here. The reason for this is that many Christians accept that the Ceremonies have been done away with but that the Civil law (10 commands) is still valid.

- Let us look at some verses that show us what the Bible describes as the "Law" of Moses.
- *1Ki 2:3 And keep the charge of the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself:*
- *2Ch 23:18 Also Jehoiada appointed the offices of the house of the LORD by the hand of the priests the Levites, whom David had distributed in the house of the LORD, to offer the burnt offerings of the LORD, as it is written in the law of Moses, with rejoicing and with singing, as it was ordained by David.*
- *2Ch 30:16 And they stood in their place after their manner, according to the law of Moses the man of God: the priests sprinkled the blood, which they received of the hand of the Levites.*
- *Luk 2:22 And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord;*
- *Joh 7:23 If a man on the sabbath day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are ye angry at me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the sabbath day?*
- *Act 15:5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.*
- *1Co 9:9 For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen?*

From these examples, the "law" is all embracing of the rules for life as a Jew. Is this true in the context of the book of Hebrews?

- *Heb 7:5 And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham:*
- *Heb 7:11 If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron?*
- *Heb 7:28 For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.*
- *Heb 9:19 For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people,*

- *Heb 9:22 And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.*
- *Heb 10:28 He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses:*

Yes!

What is the relationship between Civil and Ceremonial law and how do they work together? It starts with a civil offence, a sin. Sins were dealt with in two ways. Firstly the sinner was to make restoration. *Exo 22:1 If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep. Secondly, he was to be reconciled to God. Lev 6:4 Then it shall be, because he hath sinned, and is guilty, that he shall restore that which he took violently away.....Lev 6:6 And he shall bring his trespass offering unto the LORD.* You cannot separate Civil and Ceremonial law as they work together. One deals with the man to man problem, the other deals with the man to God problem.

The whole system that controlled life under the Old Testament was called the “Law” and it was but a shadow of better things. What was the heart of the law? *Mat 22:36 Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Mat 22:37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. Mat 22:38 This is the first and great commandment. Mat 22:39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Mat 22:40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*

In the New Testament we are not without law. *1Co 9:21 being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,* But it is not codified in the same way. If you want to know what is right and wrong now ask yourself two questions.

1. How does what I do affect my relationship with God. Is it loving?
2. How does what I do affect my relationship with my neighbour. Is it loving?

The Shadow of the Law 2

Heb 10:1 For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

We see that the Law of Moses was a complete system comprising civil and ceremonial components. It was a shadow of the things to come and as a consequence mutable, that is subject to change. That legal system could not make you “right” with God so it was necessary to replace it with a better system. This does not mean however that all that the Law of Moses stood for is bad or wrong. It means that there are higher and deeper aspects of the law.

Let me give you some examples. *Exo 20:14 Thou shalt not commit adultery. Lev 20:10 And the man that committeth adultery with another man's wife, even he that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.* This law was invoked when the Pharisees brought a woman taken in adultery to Jesus (John 8).

Blind obedience to the law would have been a death sentence to the woman. The witnesses were also the executioners. There was no attempt to rehabilitate the woman or to allow space for repentance; it was a cold and harsh punishment. Jesus' approach was to show that all men are worthy of death, even these accusers but while we expect mercy from God, we are not prepared to show it ourselves.

What is the Christian approach to this subject of adultery? Let us add a dimension by putting it in the marriage context. *Mat 19:3 The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?* (Read on). Jesus says that divorce and remarriage can be a cause of adultery.

What then should the attitude to adultery and divorce be within the church?

- For Christians it should not exist because God hates it. *Eph 5:27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.*
- Adulterers have no place in the kingdom. *1Co 6:9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,*
- We do not allow those who walk unruly walk with us. *2Th 3:14 And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. We shun them we do not kill them.*

What in the case where a couple are divorced and remarry before becoming Christians? Do we accept them in the church? I think that we do because they did it in ignorance. *Act 3:17 And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.* There is a difference between the deliberate sinning and disregard of the word of God and the sins of ignorance committed in unbelief.

The laws of Moses are not destroyed by Jesus neither are they the definitive rules for Christian living. Living right under Christ requires a lot more thought.

Types of Conscience

Heb 10:2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.

How do you know that what you feel is true? Is your conscience playing up? Do you really have a clear conscience regarding forgiveness? I raise this because the conscience is not infallible. The conscience is not a built in guide to right and wrong. *1Co 8:10 For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's Temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; Tit 1:15 Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.*

Now I am not saying that bad people always have a bad conscience for example. *Joh 8:9 And they*

which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. Joh 8:10 When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? Joh 8:11 She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. Clearly these men had a conscience regarding right and wrong, they knew in their hearts that they had done wrong against the woman. How then can bad people have a good conscience?

Let me use a modern analogy to describe what I think that the conscience is doing. The conscience acts as a computer memory and information processor that reminds you of right and wrong. You could liken it to a spell checker. It cross checks actions with thoughts and can be a useful guide. It is however open to corruption and therefore requires a filter. The processor requires a filter which is acting as an anti-virus programme in the heart. You buy an anti-virus programme for your computer to stop it being corrupted by unwanted and malicious programmes. If you have one of these utilities it is updated every day by the anti-virus provider. The provider constantly scours the “ether” for virii and creates a blocking filter that he sends to you.

Paul downloads a spiritual anti-virus into his conscience every day. *Act 24:16 And herein do I exercise myself, to have always (διαπαντός) a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.*

Now I believe that there are a lot of people out there with no anti-virus and/or corrupt anti-virus that make their conscience of no use in the sight of God. *1Ti 1:19 Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck:* Hymenaeus and Alexander let their subscription lapse.

So going back to my earlier question how do you know that you have a good conscience? You do so by downloading the right information into it. *1Ti 3:9 Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.* Download this...*Joh 6:47 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.*

Fill your heart/conscience with God’s word. It will come back to remind you of your duties and it will assure you that your sins are truly forgiven in Christ.

The Blood of Christ

Heb 10:3 But the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins. It only reminds people of their sins from one year to the next.

Isaac Watts the beloved hymn writer captures the thought perfectly in his famous hymn: “Not all the blood of beasts On Jewish altars slain, Could give the guilty conscience peace Or wash away the stain. But Christ, the heav’ly Lamb, Takes all our sins away; A sacrifice of nobler name And richer blood than they”.

Blood has from early ages been associated with the life of the creature. *Gen 9:4 But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat.* Out of respect for the life, blood as the sacred symbol of life, had to be poured into the ground, the crimson tide was “not for human consumption”.

The blood also had a mystical power. In Exodus it was a signal to the angel of death that the persons sheltering in the house were not to be killed as they had taken shelter under the blood. *Exo 12:7 And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it.* Some Christians use the term being covered by the blood of Christ to describe their protection from evil. This single act of sacrifice protected the whole family but especially the first born. The typology is not lost on us, Christ the firstborn Lamb of God for us. Take God’s lamb as the substitute.

Never throughout their lives did the Jew touch blood. It had a mystical significance and power in the ceremonies of the people. *Lev 16:19 And he shall sprinkle of the blood upon it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it, and hallow it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.* Blood was sacred and the Jew was taught to respect that.

The writer of Hebrews reminds us however that it is absurd to think that animal’s blood has the power to take away human sin. It elevates the animal above its station. Enshrined in the Lex talionis (the laws of retribution) is the statement - *Exo 21:23 And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life,* It was not possible to take an animal and substitute it for yourself if you had killed someone. You could not send a goat to the gallows.

In God’s eyes the sinner must die for his own sin and knowing that must have been the root of the guilt that men felt after they had sacrificed. Like Charles Wesley they must have thought ... “And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour’s blood?” The doubt and guilt laid the way open for the Saviour of the World. Simeon recognised Him straight away even as a baby. *Luk 2:30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,* I am sure that any true Jew saw the same in Christ.

God had over the centuries cultivated a respect for blood such that it would make it a unique occasion to participate in the blood of Christ. This was the only blood given to man and it is incorporated in our memorial, the Lord’s Table. *1Co 11:25 After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.*

As Cowper observed in his hymn, “There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel’s veins; And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains”.

A Body of Flesh 1

*Heb 10:5 Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a **body** hast thou prepared me:*

The verse today shows the necessity of the incarnation. Don't take it for granted, Jesus could have appeared among us as an angel and taught good and suffered separation from God but the purpose of God demanded more. Jesus had to become a human being in a body like yours and mine. Why? We shall explore this now. *Joh 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us*

I cannot explain how God became man or the chemistry of incarnation but I can believe it. The teaching however has been a problem for many people. The relationship between the Divine and human was a big issue in the early church as it was assembling its beliefs. One of the things we do as we read the scripture is create a framework of beliefs from the texts we read. It's a bit like writing texts on "post it" notes and then grouping the notes with similar thoughts and ideas together to make a statement of faith. It's only when you do this that you realise that there are some big gaps in what we want to know. Take for example the subject of the end times. There are hundreds of variant interpretations. Why? Because the evidence is not complete or conclusive and people fill in the gaps to try and make sense of it. Perhaps there is a lesson that where there is a lack of information God does not want us to know the answer. Is the same true of the mystery of the incarnation?

Creeds are declarations of faith, for example: *1Co 15:3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; 1Co 15:4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: 1Co 15:5 And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: 1Co 15:6 After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. 1Co 15:7 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.*

The early church warned us that fundamental truths would be undermined in time so it was essential to develop creeds.

See a number of such denials:

- A denial of God the Saviour. *Jude 4*
- A denial that Christ has come in the flesh. *1Jn 4:3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.*
- A denial of the Atonement. *2Pe 2:1 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.*
- A denial of the power of godliness. *2Ti 3:1 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. 2Ti 3:2 For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 2Ti 3:3 Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, 2Ti 3:4 Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; 2Ti 3:5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.*
- A denial of sound teaching. *2Ti 4:3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; 2Ti 4:4 And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*
- A denial of authority. *2Ti 4:1 I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ,*

who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; 2Ti 4:2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

The denials all affect the person and work of Christ. The heretical sects Christadelphians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Unitarians and Christian Science all deny the eternal deity of Christ. How would you feel if someone told lies about your family...would you regards them as a friend or a foe?

I have no doubt that this is the devils own work. Having failed to deviate Christ from the pursuit of the Cross, he is now working on Christ's followers to make them dishonour their Lord and deviate from Him. Thus it was that the early church councils met to discuss their beliefs and put them into a simple statement.

One of the first challenges came from the so called Arians who separated the Son from God entirely, so that they believed he was a creature having a beginning. "There was when he was not." The Son was but God's first creation, yet out of nothing and hence has pre-eminence over the rest of creation. The Nicene Creed (AD 325 Nicaea near Istanbul/Constantinople) countered this with a grand statement still in use today.

"We believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end."

"And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets. And we believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. And we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen."

The council of Chalcedon (Bythinia modern Turkey ad' 451) met to resolve the Monophysite controversy in which Eutyches had refused to confess the existence of two natures in Christ both after the union as well as before.

Following then the holy fathers we unite in teaching all men to confess the one and only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. This selfsame one is perfect both in deity and in humanness; this selfsame one is also actually God and actually man with a rational soul (meaning human soul) and a body. He is of the same reality as God as far as His deity is concerned and of the same reality as we ourselves as far as His humanness is concerned; thus like us

in all respects, sin only excepted. Before time began He was begotten of the Father, in respect of his deity, and now in these "last days," for us and behalf of our salvation, this selfsame one was born of Mary the virgin, who is God-bearer in respect of his humanness.

We also teach that we apprehend this one and only Christ - Son, Lord, only-begotten - in two natures and we do this without confusing the two natures, without transmuting one nature into the other, without dividing them into two separate categories, without contrasting them according to area or function. The distinctiveness of each nature is not nullified by the union. Instead, the "properties" of each nature are conserved and both natures concur in one "person" and in one reality (hypostasis). They are not divided or cut into two persons but are together the one and only and only-begotten Word (Logos) of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus have the prophets of old testified, thus the Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, thus the Symbol of Fathers (the Nicene Creed) has been handed down to us.

A Body of Flesh 2

Heb 10:5 Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me:

Arius lived and taught in Alexandria, Egypt, in the early 4th century. The most controversial of his teachings dealt with the relationship between God the Father and the person of Jesus, saying that Jesus was not one with the Father and that He was not fully, although almost, Divine in nature.

"Therefore following the holy fathers we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us.

The relation between God the Father and God the Son is stated in the first verse of John's gospel.

Joh 1:1 Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ Λόγος, καὶ ὁ Λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν, καὶ Θεὸς ἦν ὁ Λόγος. Cf Gen 1:1 Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν.

Joh 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Gen

1:1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

What does this teach? In the beginning the WORD existed. The WORD was not created but was pre-existent to creation, hence the WORD is eternal. The WORD and God were face to face before each other and whatever God was the WORD was. It is a statement of equality.

The Jehovah's Witnesses translate this as the WORD was a "god" (not God was the word) that He was Divine but not GOD the Father. Jehovah's Witnesses are modern day Arians. Yet John if he had wanted to say that had a Greek word for divine. *2Pe 1:4 Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine (Θεῖος) nature.* He does not use this!

So who is this WORD? *Rev 19:13 And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. 1Jn 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life;*

The WORD is Christ. The term reveals both the relationship and the Power of the Father. *Psa 33:6 By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.*

The WORD also reveals the mind and purpose of the individual it proceeds from. You know the saying..."*She was alright until she opened her mouth?*" We should not have known God except He revealed Himself, in other words we would not have known Him unless He spoke to us and opened His mouth. Christ is that revelation. *Joh 14:9 Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father*

We also see that the WORD is the only begotten son. *Joh 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*

What does only begotten mean? (the French puts it well, **d'un fils unique**, μονογενοῦς). Does it mean that the WORD who is the Son is a created being? Is that what only begotten means? No it is a term signifying status. Take the example of Abraham - *Heb 11:17 By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,* compare with *Gen 22:2 And he said, Take now thy son, thine **only son** (תְּנַךְ) Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.*

The Hebrew *yâchîyd* (only) means beloved; darling, only (child, son), solitary. This is a term of status because Abraham had another son Ishmael who was not his "only son" in this sense.

The eternal WORD became flesh. *Joh 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.* The pre-existent word entered humanity and took upon Himself the form of a man. *Php 2:7 But made himself*

of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: As John says, He dwelt or Tabernacled (*εσκηνωσεν*) amongst us. It is a phrase Peter uses to describe his body. *2Pe 1:13 Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this Tabernacle (εσκηνωσεν), to stir you up by putting you in remembrance;*

The humanity of Christ is seen in His life, He loved, He wept, He slept, He pitied and He was angry. He had all of the attributes of a man yet without sin. *Heb 4:15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.* He was we may say truly a man. As the confession says “at once complete in manhood, truly man”.

The Godhead of Christ is seen in John. *Joh 14:9 he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; Joh 10:30 I and my Father are one.* Omnipresent. *Joh 3:13 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. Joh 8:58 Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. Joh 20:28 And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.*

So we have come to the proof of the first part of the Confession of Chalcedon that Christ is at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man.

A Body of Flesh 3

Heb 10:5 Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me...like us in all respects, apart from sin. As regards his Godhead begotten of the Father before the ages but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures,

What do we mean by “apart from sin”? How could Jesus become a man and not inherit the sin of Adam? I would speculate that it is because that sin is transmitted through the male “seed”. *1Co 15:22 For as in Adam all die.* As a reminder of this we see the ritual of circumcision which was for males with no equivalent for females. *Gen 17:9 And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. Gen 17:10 This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. Gen 17:11 And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. Gen 17:12 And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed.*

The Catholic Church tries to get around this. In 1854 the Immaculate Conception of Mary was proclaimed and since then it has been taught that she was without sin. (But see *Luk 1:47 And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour*). The only woman without sin was Eve and that didn’t last. The Catholics also and quite naturally exalted Mary to Mediatrix. The Second Vatican Council said: ... in suffering with Him as He died on the cross she cooperated in the work of the Saviour in an altogether singular way by obedience, faith, hope and burning love to restore supernatural life to

souls... by her manifold intercession, she continues to win the gifts of eternal salvation for us. By her motherly love she takes care of the brothers of her Son who are still in pilgrimage and in dangers and difficulties. However, *1Ti 2:5 For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;*

As to His life Jesus was sinless. *Heb 4:15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.*

Then we come to another theological question. Did Christ contract sin when He became our substitute at the Cross? *1Co 15:3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;*

What does this mean? *2Co 5:21 For he hath made him to be sin for us, (τὸν γὰρ μὴ γνόντα ἀμαρτίαν).* I have not found a decent translation for this verse. The verse tends to imply that Christ became the sinner. However I think that Paul is describing Christ in His role as the sin offering. *Lev 16:27 And the bullock for the sin offering (ἀμαρτίας LXX), and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy place,* Christ never sinned! But God treated him as a sin offering so that Christ could make us acceptable to God.

Christ is the substitutionary atonement who bares our sin. By that I mean, bears the punishment for our sin but never becomes tainted by it. *1Pe 2:24 Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. Heb 9:28 So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.*

An Offering of Value 1

Heb 10:6 In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure.

We have noted that sacrifices and offerings cannot remove guilt we are now told that they did not please God. *Heb 10:4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.* How could this be since the Old Testament makes it clear that they were sweet to the Lord? *Lev 1:9 to be a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD.*

The argument now before us is derived from Psalm 40 a psalm of David. Psalm 40 is an imprecatory psalm, one of those psalm that has within it words that ask God's judgement upon the wicked. It is an interesting Psalm in that you can reverse the verses and it still makes sense.

Psa 40:1 To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David. I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.

Psa 40:2 He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.

Psa 40:3 And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.

Psa 40:4 Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.

Psa 40:5 Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.

Psa 40:6 Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required.

Psa 40:7 Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me,

Psa 40:8 I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.

Psa 40:9 I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O LORD, thou knowest.

Psa 40:10 I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation.

Psa 40:11 Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O LORD: let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me.

Psa 40:12 For innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me.

Psa 40:13 Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me: O LORD, make haste to help me.

Psa 40:14 Let them be ashamed and confounded together that seek after my soul to destroy it; let them be driven backward and put to shame that wish me evil.

Psa 40:15 Let them be desolate for a reward of their shame that say unto me, Aha, aha.

Psa 40:16 Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee: let such as love thy salvation say continually, The LORD be magnified.

Psa 40:17 But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me: thou art my help and my deliverer; make no tarrying, O my God.

David is giving thanks for deliverance and recounts the blessings that come to people who trust (have faith in) the Lord. What God really wanted from David was obedience rather than sacrifice, a lesson he had learned from the life of Saul. *1Sa 15:22 And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold to obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams.*

This is as true today as it was then. The foundation of true worship is obedience. I would say that much of what passes for religion is worthless if the truth is not followed. Queer vicars, Lesbian priestesses, false Christ's and false teaching all fall under this rejection by God.

David says his ears have been “opened” or more correctly “digged” perhaps an allusion to the verse in Exodus. *Exo 21:6 Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him for ever.* David had become an eternal servant to the Lord. David had become a preacher of God’s word.

In Hebrews we find that these words of David are attributed to Christ but they are equally applicable to David. How is this possible? It is because there are times when the Spirit of Christ enters our prayers and prays through us. *Rom 8:26 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.* David was so taken up with the thoughts of God that he assumes the person of Christ to describe his experience and thereby enters into His life. We should not find this unusual. This is how inspired scriptures come into being. *2Ti 3:16 All scripture is given by inspiration (Θεόπνευστος) of God,* More properly God breathed.

It is therefore possible to attribute the words directly to either David or Christ in this case. There are of course other cases when it is not possible. For example, Psalm 16 v10 is shown not to refer to David. *Psa 16:10 For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.* *Act 13:35 Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.* For David after he had served his own generation by the will of God fell on sleep and was laid unto his fathers and saw corruption.

So then the thought that David brings is that the value of sacrifices and offerings under the law were worthless without the obedience of faith and integrity of life. Lack of these virtues devalued the sacrifice and incidentally the value of Christ.

By the use of this Psalm the writer of the Hebrews makes the linkage between the Old Testament sacrifices and the sacrifice of Christ and in doing so exalts Christ over the blood of bulls and goats.

An Offering of Value 2

Heb 10:6 In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure.Gal 4:1 Children who are under age are no better off than slaves, even though everything their parents own will someday be theirs. CEV

The relationship between the Old Testament law and the New Testament grace is a common theme in the New Testament. It is a key element in the transition from Judaism and Christianity. It caused an argument between the Apostles (Galatians 2) and has ever since been a source of contention between Christians. It is described in terms of a marriage in Romans. *Rom 7:2 For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband.* In Galatians it is described in terms of a child and a parent or guardian.

If God had no pleasure in sacrifices, did He have no pleasure in the law? We answer that here in Galatians where we put the law into perspective. Being under law was like being a slave. *Gal 4:3 That is how it was with us. We were like children ruled by the powers of this world.* Being ruled by the powers of the world is not just by Moses laws but by all the systems and conventions that are the inventions of this world.

If you want to know what it is like to be a slave think back to your childhood. You were always being told what to do, when to do it, how to do it and you were never allowed to make many of your own

choices. You had to work for nothing go to bed when you were told, eat what you were given and after all that be thankful. No wonder you cannot wait to leave home! I remember when I got my "freedom", it was like entering a room full of silence. There were no voices moaning at me, telling me what to do, making decisions for me....it was a strange experience.

Yes, as Paul observes, children are no better off than slaves! Welcome to slavery!

We might ask, "Why did we have to have the law, why not go straight to Christ?" *Rom 5:20 Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: Rom 7:7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.*

It was part of the purpose of God to make mankind aware of the depths into which he had fallen, to make him aware of the sinfulness of sin. To do this God treated men like children in order to instruct them and made them slaves to the law. As Paul recounts later in Galatians, the Jews were slaves to the law. *Gal 4:25 For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.*

The services and rituals of the law, the killing of animals, and the minutiae of the laws were not there to make men right with God; they were there to educate man as to how far they were separated from God. In that respect man's obedience did not gain him any favour with God neither did mans action please God. *Heb 10:6 In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure.* God's pleasure was in Christ His only begotten Son. Only those who come to that personal relationship with Christ can honour the Father. Those who spend their lives in seeking other relationships are doomed to remain slaves forever.

Being Made Holy

Heb 10:10 So we are made holy because Christ obeyed God and offered himself once for all. CEV Heb 10:10 By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. AV

To many people a Saint is a revered senior or leading member of the Christian church. St Paul, St Peter, St John (notice they are New Testament not Older Testament). They are regarded as "Holy" persons, using holiness in the sense of being set apart for sacred use, consecrated and purified. (Latin Sanctus, holy). Their lives are considered to be way above the average in morality and works. Yet here we are told that saints are made by Christ, they do not make themselves. We are made holy.

*1Co 1:2 Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified (**ηγιασμένοις**) in Christ Jesus, called to be saints (**αγιοις**), with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:*

It is clear then that a Saint is a person who is set apart or Sanctified by God and called Saint. Called doesn't mean that these people were called as a name Saints. It means that they were called or

invited to that condition by God. *Rom 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.* They are called or summoned according to His purpose. Paul was a called Apostle *Rom 1:1 Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God,* It is a vocation. Vulgate: vocatus apostolus.....vocatis sanctis.

Very early on however the meaning of the word saint began to change. According to the Roman Catholic church, as Christianity began to spread it became clear that some Christians lived lives of extraordinary or heroic, virtue. While other Christians struggled to live out the gospel of Christ these people were eminent examples of the moral virtues and they easily practiced the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. The word "saint" thus became more narrowly applied to such people who were venerated after their deaths as saints, usually by the members of their local church or the Christians in the region where they lived, because they were familiar with their good deeds. Eventually, the Catholic Church created a process called "canonization", through which such venerable people could be recognized as saints by all Christians everywhere. They also require miracles after death.

Isn't this strange? God lets real saints work miracles in life. How many of the Catholic "saints" did this? Sanctification means separation. *Luk 16:26 And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.* This separation extends to the living and the dead. Just who then is doing these Catholic miracles?

The Bible teaches that if you are not a saint in life you will never be one in death. The Bible teaches that we pray to God alone and not to dead saints or Mary. The Bible teaches that we are saints not by what we do but by what we believe. The Bible teaches that we are saints by God's calling not by anything we can ever do. The Bible teaches that we are saints because Christ died for us.

The End of the World

Heb 10:12 But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.

The death of Christ was the first trumpet of Judgement. God is now working towards the judgement of this world when He will bring all things to the feet of Christ. *Psa 110:1 The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.* The footstool is where the King rested His feet and where those who visited Him showed respect by bowing at His feet. *Psa 99:5 Exalt ye the LORD our God, and worship at his footstool; for he is holy.*

The day is coming when all humanity will do this. *Php 2:10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;* Hitler, Saddam Hussein, Stalin will all be there bowing to Jesus. They will be prostrated by the power of God at the feet of His son. Their short and evil earthly power will have no value other than to condemn them to eternal punishment.

Mat 13:24 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. **Read to v 43.** The world we live in is a mix of good and bad, the wheat and the tares (black wheat). The bad is sown together in this world and it is harvested together but the bad is harvested FIRST and burned. It is burned as a sign that it is valueless; it is worthless in God's sight.

Mat 25:41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: The devil does not run Hell he is a victim of it along with those who reject Christ. God does not annihilate them, He roasts them forever. *Rev 19:3 And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever. Mat 3:12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.* They suffer forever for their sin and wickedness without any hope of relief.

How does this square with a loving God? *1Jn 3:16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.* The love of God is seen in the death of Christ. If we reject that death and sacrifice we can see the love of God. It has no meaning apart from the death of Christ. God's love is not unconditional.

Those who have rejected the death of Christ have rejected the love of God. There is nothing that can be done for them or rather nothing that will be done for them. *Mat 13:42 Then he will throw them into a flaming furnace, where people will cry and grit their teeth in pain.* They will suffer, probably tormenting themselves for what they foolishly and blindly failed to grasp.

And for now, Christ is sitting beside God waiting and expecting this momentous event.

Enemies

Heb 10:13 From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. AV Heb 10:13 and he will stay there until his enemies are put under his power. CEV

If Jesus tells us - *Mat 5:44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies,* why is He anticipating their downfall? Is this a double standard, don't do what I do, do what I say? Certainly not as we shall see. For many however love is considered more important than Justice. It's this sort of thinking that magnifies God's attribute of love over God's attribute of Justice. God becomes a God of Love and not a God of Justice.

Remember when the disciples wanted vengeance on the Samaritans? *Luk 9:52 And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him. Luk 9:53 And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. Luk 9:54 And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? Luk 9:55 But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. Luk 9:56 For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village.*

The disciples had the “wrong” spirit. They were guided by the letter of the law not the grace of the law. Let us remind ourselves that vengeance was limited by the Lex Talionis, the law of retribution. *Lev 24:19 And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbour; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him;*

Unfortunately these laws were taken to be mandatory, in other words you had to do them. Jesus makes the point that we do not stoop to that level we rise above it, hard though it is. *Mat 5:38 Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: Mat 5:39 But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. Mat 5:40 And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. Mat 5:41 And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Mat 5:42 Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.*

Luk 6:35 But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. We ourselves were once no different. Col 1:21 And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled

Vengeance is not wrong indeed the blood of the Saints cries for it. *Rev 6:9 And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: Rev 6:10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?*

The word vengeance means punishment inflicted in retaliation for an injury or offence. It is simply the effect brought about by sin. The point is that it is not within our remit or authority to administer it. Vengeance will be administered but that is the prerogative of God!

Rom 12:19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Rom 12:20 Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

Christ anticipates this judgement as he starts His reign. *Mar 12:36 For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The LORD said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool.*

These people are enemies for a number of reasons and let us be clear why. Firstly, they are children of the devil. *Eph 2:2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Mat 13:39 The enemy that sowed them is the devil; Secondly, they are disobedient. Jas 4:4 Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.*

God’s very nature demands justice and so He must punish evil. Christ is no longer on a cross but on a throne and whereas the cross symbolises forgiveness, the throne symbolises judgement.

You and I are there by grace, not by birth or merit. You deserve no less than the other enemies. *Rom 5:10 For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son,*

Changing Hearts and Minds 1

Heb 10:16 This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; Heb 10:16 "When the time comes, I will make an agreement with them. I will write my laws on their minds and hearts. CEV

"Hearts and Minds" was a euphemism for a campaign by the United States military during the Vietnam War intended to win the popular support of the Vietnamese people. The term "hearts and minds" as a method to bring a subjugated population on side was first used during the Malayan Emergency by the British who employed practices to keep the Malayans' trust and reduce a tendency to side with the ethnic Chinese communists. It is the process of not just winning people emotionally but also changing their will and direction.

We are describing the change process in human life here in Hebrews. In the Bible the change process or the turning process is described as repentance and that by God's gift. *Rom 2:4 the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? It is an emotional change. 2Co 7:10 For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.*

Changing people is not at all easy. Many of the world's problems are due to this fact. Take for example HIV, the auto-immune deficiency disease. Thabo Mbeki surrounded himself by AIDS denialists during his tenure as South Africa's president and that decision cost his country an estimated 330,000 lives. Ignoring medical assurances that HIV can lead to AIDS, Mbeki chose not to distribute life saving antiviral drugs despite the fact that neighbouring countries like Namibia and Botswana had tremendous success with similar treatment. Mbeki who was forced from office in 2008 refused to discuss his decision making process but most fingers are pointing to Manto Tshabalala-Msimang the Health Minister who believed garlic and lemon juice among other things could help HIV positive South Africans overcome their ailment. Interestingly the country with the highest distribution rate of condoms is South Africa and yet the opposite result is happening.

The Jesuits used to say, 'Give me a child for the first seven years, and you may do what you like with him afterwards. They knew that by the time a child had reached seven his character would largely be set and even at that tender age you could 'see' the man. The child is the father of the man. People are often set in their ways very early in life. That's why it is so hard for people to become Christians. It requires a miracle.'

When you think about it all of the world's problems would be greatly reduced if men had the heart and mind of Christ. *Php 2:5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.* The world financial crisis is the result of Christless living. However change is something you cannot do for yourself. You cannot do it by learning or by copying because that is superficial. It is just surface change. It is the same reason why we cannot work our way into God's good books. It is all the product of the Divine "I will". You cannot but "I will". There are some 1500 "I will's" in the Bible each one carrying with it the weight of certainty.

From the first where God wills a wife to the last where He wills us as sons it is all beyond our control.
Gen 2:18 And the LORD God said..... I will make him an help meet for him. Rev 21:7 *He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.*

Changing Hearts and Minds 2

Heb 10:16 When the time comes, I will make an agreement with them. I will write my laws on their minds and hearts.

We raised the question previously as to when this happens. Perhaps also it is important how it happens. There are things that the Lord asks us to do that are clearly impossible. *Jas 4:8purify your hearts, ye double minded.* You can no more do that than you can remove sin and forgive yourself or love God.

Take these two statements: *Act 17:30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:* *Act 3:19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;* Can you really repent?

Take this example. *Deu 10:16 Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked.* On the face of it a reasonable request but it is impossible. It is saying that you need to cut off the flesh and enter into a covenant with God. What is the way through the impasse? It is this. *Deu 30:6 And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.* It is one of those seeming contradictions of scripture where God demands the impossible.

Where God demands the impossible we must ask Him to undertake it for us. *Php 2:12 work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.* *Php 2:13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*

The whole transformation from death in sin to Life in Christ is described under various analogies.

New Birth. *1Pe 1:23 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. You cannot birth yourself.*

The Old Man. *Eph 4:22 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; Rom 6:6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.* It is Christ who renders him dead.

Metamorphosis. *Rom 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.* We can no more change our minds than we can shed our skins!

The transformation that occurs is a Sovereign act of God. The Bible acts in some measure as a catalogue. You see something that you like and should want but it doesn't just roll up on your doorstep. You have to request it. How much have we missed out in our Christian lives because we did not ask for it?

David cries out in His sin. *Psa 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.* He realises his inability and asks God to do it. It is not something that just happens automatically. Here I think is something that we should ask for.

When did it start with you?



The Lord's Table

Heb 10:17 And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Heb 10:18 Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is the unbloody sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Christ. It is substantially the same as the bloody sacrifice of the cross and was instituted by Our Lord Jesus Christ at the Last Supper on the first Holy Thursday evening just as He was entering upon His Passion. Then it was that He changed bread and wine into His most holy Body and Blood and offered them in sacrifice giving at the same time to His Apostles and their successors the power and the command to continue this sacred action in commemoration of Him to the end of time. Website: TheHolyMass.com is dedicated to Our Lady of the Most Blessed Sacrament.

According to the Catholic Church when the bread and wine are consecrated in the Eucharist they cease to be bread and wine and become instead the body and blood of Christ. Although the empirical appearances are not changed the reality is changed by the power of the Holy Spirit who has been called down upon the bread and wine. The consecration of the bread (known as the host) and wine represents the separation of Jesus' body from his blood at Calvary. However since He has

risen the Church teaches that His body and blood can no longer be truly separated. Where one is the other must be. Therefore although the priest (or minister) says "The body of Christ" when administering the host and "The blood of Christ" when presenting the chalice the communicant who receives either one receives Christ whole and entire.

The mysterious change of the reality of the bread and wine began to be called "transubstantiation" in the eleventh century.

Haydock's Catholic Bible Commentary, 1859 edition

"It is very true, that Christ hath paid the ransom of all our sins, and his satisfactions are infinite; but to partake of the benefit of this general redemption, the merits and satisfaction of Christ are to be applied to our souls, and this by the order of Providence is to be done not only by faith but by other virtues, by good works, by the sacraments, and by repeating the oblation and the same sacrifice, the manner only being different".

There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.

Would you o'er evil a victory win?
There's wonderful power in the blood.

Perhaps the Catholic position has some merit, in that it encourages a better focus on the death by considering Him as really present not just as present in emblems. The sanctions in Corinthians for misuse would tend to support this because eating bread and drinking wine does not usually cause sickness and death but it can here.

1Co 11:26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. 1Co 11:27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. 1Co 11:28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. 1Co 11:29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. 1Co 11:30 For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.

The Lord's Table is clearly more than just ordinary food.

Entering God's Presence

Heb 10:19 Seeing therefore, brethren, that by the blood of Jesus we may be bold to enter into the Holy place, Geneva. Heb 10:19 Therefore, brothers [and sisters], having confidence [or, a joyful sense of freedom] for the entrance into the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ALT

The Holy place is where the High Priest entered on the Day of Atonement. *Lev 23:27 Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD.* And this ritual is described in Leviticus Chapter 16. Entry was strictly limited and a pre-condition was

holiness. *Lev 10:1 And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not.* *Lev 10:2 And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.* *Lev 10:3 Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the LORD spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified.* And Aaron held his peace.

Because they failed to obey the rules, Aaron lost his two sons. God does not bend the rules for family! God did the same to Eli. *1Sa 2:12 Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the LORD.*

The Holy Place where God met with man and made His base on Earth was a fearsome place. It wasn't open to anyone only the priests (Levites) and then on very strict conditions and at special times. The verse before us would have amazed the Jews. It amounts to God changing the rules and operating an "open door" policy. To use an analogy it is like going up to Buckingham Palace walking through the front gates, across the courtyard, past the guards and in through the front door unmolested.

We have access to God, direct access. There are no searches at the gate, letters of introduction, waiting lists, queues, tickets, bookings, special training, people who have to accompany you etc. You have total freedom but you do have a passport. I liked the way the Analytical Literal Translation put it, "having a joyful sense of freedom". You should think on this! How many forms of religion are strictly manipulated by a master cult? Specially trained intermediaries? God has removed all of that and perhaps that is what makes it so amazing?

It has been made possible because of Jesus. *Heb 9:12 Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.* This verse is about status. It is about empowerment. It is about freedom.

The word "bold" is an interesting choice of words and can also be translated openly. *Joh 7:4 for there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly.* Or "Plainly" *Joh 10:24 If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly.* It describes how we should feel about our freedom to enter the presence of God.

If a person feels uncomfortable at threshold of God's presence, if they have uncertainty and fear, they must take a step backward and see if they have the blood of Jesus. For it is the blood of Jesus that gives the openness or boldness to move in God's presence. It is just as the High Priest could go boldly where none had gone before because he was carrying the blood of the sacrifice. You must also have blood to enter.

The first known use of passports occurs in the Old Testament. *Neh 2:7 Moreover I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over till I come into Judah;* It was a document that allowed unhindered passage. You have been given a passport. You have a passport written in blood. The blood of Christ gives you free and bold passage into a relationship with God.

But there is also something else implied in this verse that we shall look into.

Empowerment and Freedom

Heb 10:19 Seeing therefore, brethren, that by the blood of Jesus we may be bold to enter into the Holy place, Geneva. Heb 10:19 Therefore, brothers [and sisters], having confidence [or, a joyful sense of freedom] for the entrance into the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ALT

We saw that this verse is about status. It is about empowerment. It is about freedom. It is about status because it confers upon you the Christian the same rights of access to God as the High Priest of the Old Testament. These rights were not given to the ordinary citizen of Israel, the Jew. Ordinary Jews could not enter into a close relationship with God other than through the priest.

We do not need religious technicians to add value to our religious lives. We do not need technicians to christen us or declare us married, we do not need technicians to confer the last rites upon us or to bury us. We are free to act in the sight of God unfettered by men.

Many Christians find this freedom hard to use. They are still trapped by tradition and the order of this world. They do not like to be different yet that is what God has made them. Why is this? There are two primary reasons - fear and unbelief.

Now you might say that I am digging too much out of this verse but look at this. *1Pe 2:5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.* Peter who is credited as the first Pope sets forward a church that is a priesthood not a class of priests.

But Peter goes much further. *1Pe 2:9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:*

He says that we are a royal priesthood. The only order of King Priests was the Melchizedekian priesthood. *Heb 7:1 For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him;* These verses argued that the Jewish priesthood was inferior to the priesthood of Melchizedek. *Heb 7:7 Everyone agrees that a person who gives a blessing is greater than the one who receives the blessing.* That is Melchizedek was greater than Abraham.

It was an ancient order associated with Christ. This means that the priesthood of Christ of which you are a member is related to the oldest priesthood that resided outside of the Jewish Nation. *Psa 110:4 The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.* The Lord has made a promise that will never be broken. You will be a priest forever, just like Melchizedek. This teaching shows us something else. It shows us that the Jewish nation while privileged for a period were not the perfect example of the Christian priesthood. We belong to the ancient order of Melchizedek.

We should be encouraged by this to see that in the eyes of God we are higher in rank than any earthly monarch and as such we should live up to our position.

The Right Way

Heb 10:20 By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; Heb 10:20 by a new way that leads to life! And this way takes us through the curtain that is Christ himself. CEV

We see that we are given the privilege of the high priest “by the blood of Jesus,” this was the MEANS and now we see THE WAY. The Holy of Holies was where God met the people. *Exo 25:22 And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel.* It was like a Divine call box where man could talk to God. Not everyone had access and those who did had a protocol to follow (a protocol is a convention or standard that controls or enables the connection).

Moses describes the curtain or veil. *Exo 26:31 And thou shalt make a vail of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen of cunning work: with cherubims shall it be made: And thou shalt hang it upon four pillars of shittim wood overlaid with gold: their hooks shall be of gold, upon the four sockets of silver. And thou shalt hang up the vail under the taches, that thou mayest bring in thither within the vail the ark of the testimony: and the vail shall divide unto you between the holy place and the most holy. And thou shalt put the mercy seat upon the ark of the testimony in the most holy place.*

People think that prayer is like an open line to God. God just happens to be where they want Him to be and He is listening all the time. I don’t think so. *Joh 10:1 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.* People who have their own entry mode are thieves and robbers. They rob God of His Honour and they steal from His Glory. The way is as important as the means.

Jesus is the new and living way. *Joh 10:9 I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.* Jesus is the means and the way. As the World celebrates the resurrection of Jesus it should also be celebrating the benefit of the way to God.

The scripture records a strange event that occurred when Jesus died. *Mat 27:50 Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the Temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose,* The veil was torn from top to bottom not bottom to top. It was an act of God not an act of man. It was a symbolic act associating the death of Jesus with the breaking down of the barrier to God.

The scripture before us tells us that the veil or curtain is Jesus. And this way takes us through the curtain that is Christ himself. This again confirms for us that the older testament symbols, the blood,

the mercy seat and the veil were all images of Christ and each element gives us a glance at some aspect of His person and Work.

You cannot get to God without the blood of Jesus or without going through Jesus. Believe what you will but this is what God says and what God wants. People feel that this is unfair and exclusive. It is not exclusive it is conditional and it is open to all. *Joh 6:37 All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*

Provocation

Heb 10:24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:

Some people think that provocation among Christians is wrong. We should not provoke each other. There are of course different types of provocation. (Parapikrasmos to make bitter, **paroxusmos a stimulation**, paroxuno to sharpen, erethizo to excite ,parorgizo to provoke to wrath.) Some forms of provocation are quite wrong and malicious. Others are good and for a good purpose.

The word here is “paroxysm” just as in Acts where Paul gets into a dispute over the reliability of Mark. *Act 15:38 But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. Act 15:39 And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus;*

Paroxysm is derived from the root “oxus” meaning sharp. We are not talking about encouraging to good works or setting an example. We are talking about prodding someone with a sharp stick!

Here is a provoking story I heard.

“Brian Burnie is selling his historic spa hotel and estate and will use the proceeds to fund a cancer charity. The philanthropist, who started life in a red brick terraced home in Newcastle, said he hoped to die penniless. Mr Burnie, 64, built up his business empire after leaving school aged 15 to work as a grocery delivery boy. He has spent more than £16m, and 14 years, transforming 191-year-old Doxford Hall, near Alnwick in Northumberland, into one of the country's most luxurious hotels. He is only a matter of weeks from completing the project and proceeds from the sale will go to establish, and fund "forever", a Marie Curie or Macmillan cancer nurse for north Northumberland and a set of vehicles to take cancer patients to and from hospital.”

We do not get much provocation to do good these days. We live in the days of self. It is not about encouraging others it is about promoting self and self gain. Those at the heart of Government who we placed over us have exhibited that quite clearly and they are a reflection of us.

We want respect but do not give it. We lack respect for others but have an obsession with being treated with respect ourselves. And the less respect we encounter the less prepared we are to offer any to anyone else. It's no longer true that most people aspire to having good manners, many just want to protect their egos in every social encounter. Conscious of our jealous sensitivity to any slight

we go out into the public arena armed only with our own willingness to be aggressive or oblivious in response. It is this attitude that puts the rights of minorities above the established rights of the many.

Society is imploding on itself because it is a selfish society. Our scripture today asks us to consider (put in mind) one another for the provocation of good and love. That attitude is one of explosion, a society that puts itself out. Those times that have seen revival have been times when the church was unselfish. *Act 4:32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.*

This verse should make us uncomfortable, the sharp stick of provocation should show us just where we stand in love and good works.

Meeting Together

Heb 10:25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

This verse connects with the previous verse encouraging us to support and encourage each other by meeting together. This verse has often been used to encourage church attendance and church membership. This is the sense given in the CEV translation. *Heb 10:25 Some people have gotten out of the habit of meeting for worship, but we must not do that.*

As a new Christian I remember being approached many times to “join” a church. I was viewed as rebellious because I would not settle into established religious patterns. At this end of my life, looking back over the years I consider that churches have made themselves irrelevant and isolationist by the very practices that they set up to safeguard the faith. They live in the past but not in the past where Jesus walked. They live somewhere in the Reformation 500 years ago.

I have always had a natural aversion to “joining” things. Joining tends to restrict and limit choice. Where did the Bible teach that I had to join a church? The arguments for were many but they were not Bible based. “A coal taken out of the fire will not burn on its own”. Rubbish! Tell that to John on Patmos or Bunyan.

Then there was the argument from the verse today. I remember pointing out that I was already going to church, membership was another step. How did assembling come to mean membership? At the Baptist church we were attending I nearly succumbed to the group pressure. I wrote a letter requesting membership and on the Sunday I was going to deliver it an incident happened and I never handed it in. I was saved from making a mistake. I learned that whatever the pressure of tradition or other people my duty was to the scripture truth. If you start down the path of compromise you set precedents from which it is nearly impossible to recover.

The verse in front of us is not about membership of a particular brand or denomination. It is not about Sunday worship and rolling up to a meeting. It is about BEING a church. What do I mean? I

mean that it is not about being a passenger in a religious order it is about being a Christian and contributing to Christian life. It is about provoking, exhorting and encouraging each other in the faith. Many systems of religion work against this verse. They do not create the environment where Christians can interact with each other.

Membership was designed to limit the access and influence of unbelievers in congregations. It was an exclusive club with a restrictive membership. Some churches even took the name onto their notice boards. They became Restricted Baptists or Strict Baptists. The Lord's Table was restricted to members only! Membership in reality is a sign of unbelief because it does not rely on God and His methods to keep the church clean.

What happened in the early church? *1Co 14:23 If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? 1Co 14:24 But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: 1Co 14:25 And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.*

Churches were clearly assemblies of believers. If an unbeliever came in the order and ministry these itself would have a convicting effect. Babbling in other tongues and disorder would make them think that we are mad. They did not resort to doormen to keep unbelievers out or resort to membership or special admission tokens. They resorted to sound practice.

Willow Creek ministries is a modern attempt to make Christianity relevant. "Every Sunday morning about 15,000 people gather in the Willow Creek Community Church (WCCC). This is not your regular church service. There is no organ, piano, hymnbooks. They do not join in singing the grand old hymns of the Christian faith. Neither is there a Biblical sermon preached. This is their so-called Seeker Service, which is produced in order to get lost people to enjoy church without guilt or shame. There are no sermons against sin nor is there a call for repentance. Instead of this there is plenty of rock music from a rock band. Instead of a Biblical sermon they feature dramas and multi-media. Of course, the lost man likes to be entertained and he gets plenty of that at WCCC"

In a firsthand account by a Willow Creek insider that the "Church Growth" principles of consensus, tolerance and ecumenism that were implemented years ago by Willow Creek have left them wide open to the infiltration of New Age teachings and Eastern mysticism, under the guise of "Christian experience." This should be a warning that Willow Creek and other Church Growth Ministries regardless of their orthodox Faith Statements are actually leading their congregations through a consensus process that dismisses the authority and sufficiency of Scripture while embracing the alternative "truths" of mysticism, spiritualism and other false belief systems. Do not be fooled by these wolves in sheep's clothing...

We shall explore the verse before us further shortly but for now we have opened some of the issues that it addresses. The churches have always and always will be under attack. The attacks that do the biggest damage come from within. *1Jn 2:18 Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last*

time.

Splits come from within and rarely from without. It is understandable that people would want to try and make safeguards but God has given them to us. However if we work according to the pattern and teaching of scripture it will deal with error. We should not grasp verses out of context as happens here and use it as a stick to beat people to go to church or join a church. People who are Christ's will naturally come together as we shall see.

What matters is that Christian people come together and it could be anywhere. It could be for a meal, a walk, a Bible study, shopping or other activity. It is for mutual encouragement. It is in line with this verse: *Deu 6:6 And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: Deu 6:7 And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.* Talk about them all the time, whether you're at home or walking along the road, going to bed at night or getting up in the morning.

Whatever we are doing can be a meeting.

Back Sliding

Heb 10:25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

We concluded last week that whatever we are doing can be a meeting. What though would cause us to "forsake" assembling? What changes us? It is a change in collective responsibility, "ourselves". It is not about individual change although that may be part of it. *Jdg 3:12 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD: and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD.*

A word is used to describe this in the Old Testament. It is "backsliding". *Jer 3:6 The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot.*

The word gives us a picture of a person who has climbed the mountain and now slides away from his achievement. It comes from a person becoming selfish and self-centred. *Pro 14:14 The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man shall be satisfied from himself.* Churches can backslide. *Rev 2:4 But I do have something against you! And it is this: You don't have as much love as you used to.* Think about where you have fallen from and then turn back and do as you did at first.

In Revelation we come across a church that has lost its way. *Rev 3:14 And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;* It still meets but it does not meet the standards of God. It "assembles together" but that has little value. Laodicea was indifferent. I remind us that this verse, Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together is not about going to church, it is about being a church.

It is quite easy to identify indifference. It shows when we do not get concerned about the truths of Christ in life, when we have no Bible based opinion on issues, in short when we are not angered about unrighteousness.

Numbers illustrates my point. *Num 25:3 And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.* In the midst of indifference and evil there was a man who had the heart of God. *Num 25:11 Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for my sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy.* Phineas was jealous of God's position be undermined by godless people. Ask yourself do you feel like that? Do you really hate the evil of this world? You should!

If Phineas had been indifferent to the adulterous behaviour in Israel he would have been grouped with them. He was not however their friend. *Jas 4:4 Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?* Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

None of the seven churches of Revelation are really triumphant and strong. They are all trying to hang in in the face of opposition. It is all too easy to get dragged under in the world we live in but there is something that we can do. We can apply Christianity to ourselves. I hope that you do not rely on Sunday meetings to supply your Christian input and that you give time to personal study yourselves. If you don't then you know where you are heading and your faith will diminish. You could not live if you ate once a week and I do not believe a Christian can live if he does not feed himself daily.

Promote your own interest.

Wilful Sin

Heb 10:26 For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, AV

What is wilful sin? The word wilful is used only twice in the New Testament. Here and in Peter where it is translated willingly (*ekouσίως*). *1Pe 5:2 Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;* The word is used in the Old Testament LXX to translate the Hebrew word נְדָבָה nedâbâh means spontaneous. It is freewill, and appears in Leviticus. *Lev 23:38 Beside the sabbaths of the LORD, and beside your gifts, and beside all your vows, and beside all your freewill offerings, which ye give unto the LORD.*

These offerings were not legally required but were from the heart. Voluntarily means free of coercion, duress or undue inducement. Basically what you want to do, without any condition or obligation, what from the mere motion of his mind he freely offered, not being directed to it by any command of God.

So is there such a thing as voluntary sin and involuntary sin? Surely sin is sin? *Jas 2:10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.* *1Jn 3:4 Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law:* For sin is the transgression of the law. So every time we sin we commit an offence against God's rules. All sin is voluntary. *Jas 1:13 Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man:* But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

We cannot blame God for our sin. We cannot blame others. *Gen 3:12 And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.* We are personally guilty and must suffer the consequences. So where does that leave us? Surely it's not worth going on. We cannot beat the disease. *1Jn 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* We are dammed on all counts.

So what is the purpose of this verse? Is it to condemn us or warn us? Taken in the context of John: *1Jn 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Taken in the context of the next two verses it points to an attitude that despises the work of God and openly tramples on it. *Joh 1:10 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.* *Joh 1:11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not.*

If sin were not forgiveable we would not need an advocate but one is provided. *1Jn 2:1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:* *1Jn 2:2 And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*

Let us remind ourselves that propitiation is a sacrifice that removes God's anger. Through Christ God's anger is removed. If we trample on the sacrifice of Christ and despise it where then is the advocate? We have despised the advocate. There can be no propitiation!

I think the verse is a warning against deliberate habitual sin

Neglecting Your Faith

Heb 10:30 For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Our verses are found together in the Song of Moses. *Deu 32:35 To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.* *Deu 32:36 For the LORD shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone, and there is none shut up, or left.*

This song is Moses death song. *Deu 31:30 And Moses spake in the ears of all the congregation of Israel the words of this song, until they were ended.* *Deu 32:48 And the LORD spake unto Moses that*

selfsame day, saying, Deu 32:49 Get thee up into this mountain Abarim, unto mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, that is over against Jericho; and behold the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel for a possession: Deu 32:50 And die in the mount whither thou goest up, and be gathered unto thy people; as Aaron thy brother died in mount Hor, and was gathered unto his people:

It shows that Moses was not unhappy at the prospect of death. *Jas 5:13 Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.* It shows us what really concerned Moses as he approached the grave. It was not his own salvation it was that of his people.

Deu 31:19 Now therefore write ye this song for you, and teach it the children of Israel: put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the children of Israel. The wider context of the Song is a reflection upon the past 40 years in the wilderness and the apostasy of the Nation. God threatens to kindle the Bonfire of the vanities. *Deu 32:21 They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation. Deu 32:22 For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell, and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains.*

Why would genuine Christians need such a warning as this? I think that it is because we are all prone to apathy and neglect of the faith.

60% of new Church members or those who visit, will quit going after 6 months or less and 85% of High School students quit going to church after they start college. Church attendance will fall by 90% by 2050 according to reports. USA Today magazine recently reported on an almost unbelievable new survey that has found that 52 percent of American Christians believe that eternal life is not exclusively for those who accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour. A different survey that was taken last year by the Pew Research Centre's Forum on Religion & Public Life found that 57 percent of evangelical Christians in America believe that "many religions can lead to eternal life."

Not only are Christians prone to apostasy they are prone to compromise. *2Ti 4:3 The time is coming when people won't listen to good teaching. Instead, they will look for teachers who will please them by telling them only what they are itching to hear. CEV.*

Spurgeon wrote: "God's Word, in this age, is a small affair; some do not even believe it to be inspired; and those who profess to revere it set up other books in a sort of rivalry with it. Why, there are great Church dignitaries now-a-days who write against the Bible, and yet find bishops to defend them."

Rowan Williams, "Arch druid" of Canterbury preaches a different gospel. He replaces the pattern of guilt and deserved retribution, dealt with by substitution, as central in Scripture, with a victim theology where the atonement is about men inflicting wounds, not God bearing his own judgement In Christ. This, is in short a different doctrine of salvation from that of the Bible, the early church, the Reformers and therefore from the formularies of the Church of England. Williams says that he is rejecting a doctrine 'of an earlier age', a phrase, which overlooks the place which the penal doctrine

holds in the minds of Anglican Evangelicals around the world and which suggests a worrying lack of familiarity with what so many of the people he will be leading believe.

When the head of a national church is clearly not a Christian and denies the blood of Christ we see how steep the hill was for Spurgeon's downgrade and that it still has not reached the ground.

A Brave and Confident Christian

*Heb 10:35 Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. AV
Heb 10:35 Keep on being brave! It will bring you great rewards. CEV*

Braveness and confidence are hallmarks of the Christian. In the next chapter we see what makes men bold or brave and that is faith.

For some people the line between bravery and stupidity is very fine. The Crimean Campaign was the first war to be covered by regular correspondents especially by reporters as perceptive and critical as William Howard Russell of The Times. Under his scrutiny the errors of officers, their prejudices and rigid attitudes did not go unnoticed. He reported the disgraceful shortages of proper clothing and equipment, the ravages of cholera and typhoid fever, which caused the deaths of 20,000 men against the 3,400 killed in battle during the war. He also reported for the first time the courage and endurance of the ordinary British soldier. When the infantry stormed the heights above the Alma River, when the 93rd formed the 'thin red line' at Balaklava, when the Heavy Brigade charged the Russian cavalry and the Light Brigade the guns, Russell watched and reported what he saw to the British public.

At the time the most esteemed award for military prowess in the British Army was the Order of the Bath ,but the Bath was awarded only to senior officers. Junior officers and even Non Commissioned Officers might win promotion in the field or 'brevet rank' as this kind of promotion was called. It was also possible to win distinction by being mentioned in the general's despatches but at the outset of the war most of these honours were given to staff officers immediately under the general's eye and very rarely to the officers actually engaged in front-line action. The common soldier might expect a campaign medal but this would be issued to every man who took part in the war whether he had fought bravely or not. To remedy this situation the Distinguished Conduct Medal was instituted for Non Commissioned Officers and Privates in 1854. This medal carried a pension and was highly valued but there was a growing awareness of the need for a decoration which would be open to all regardless of rank and which would more fairly reflect the individual gallantry of men in the front line.

The British sense of fair play and a genuine admiration for gallant behaviour certainly played a part in the decision to institute a new award but there may also have been an element of cynicism. Medals are a potent incentive to courage in battle, but they are also cheap. The idea of The Victoria Cross was born and Prince Albert paid a leading role in its development.

The Civil Service's proposal was clumsy and long-winded: 'the Military Order of Victoria', Albert put his pencil through this and suggested 'The Victoria Cross'. Throughout the document wherever the

word 'Order' with its overtones of aristocratic fraternity occurred Albert applied his pencil. 'Treat it as a Cross granted for distinguished service' he noted 'which will make it simple and intelligible'.

These symbols of bravery are now being rejected by people who are prepared to enjoy the benefits won by our soldiers but reject the sacrifice. A medal of honour (Trinity Cross) established by the Queen has been declared illegal after Muslim and Hindu groups complained that its Christian associations were offensive. The association with peace and prosperity is of course quite acceptable, thank you.

Just what that bravery consists of may be gained from this analogy of a double Victoria Cross winner. There have only been three persons who have won the Victoria Cross twice. The person I want to look at is Noel Chavasse.

This man was a Christian and was not inspired by stupidity, recklessness or even the youthful desire for fame and recognition. It was done out of a sense of righteous duty to his fellow man. It was done out of the ability to apply his God given skills to those less fortunate. It was selfless and calculated. In his last letter to his fiancé, he wrote "Tell her duty called and called me to obey". His father had written on his grave "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend".

Deu 31:6 Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Deu 31:7 And Moses called unto Joshua, and said unto him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou must go with this people unto the land which the LORD hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it. Deu 31:8 And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed.

Be brave and strong! Don't be afraid of the nations on the other side of the Jordan. The LORD your God will always be at your side and He will never abandon you. Then Moses called Joshua up in front of the crowd and said: Joshua, be brave and strong as you lead these people into their land. The LORD made a promise long ago to Israel's ancestors that this land would someday belong to Israel. That time has now come and you must divide up the land among the people.

Joshua was called upon to lead the people into the Promised Land. It was now his duty. He had to summon up in himself the courage and strength to undertake God's promise.

Where did he get it from? *Deu 31:23 And he gave Joshua the son of Nun a charge, and said, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou shalt bring the children of Israel into the land which I sware unto them: and I will be with thee.*

It is like the father with the demon possessed son. He could believe so far but was being asked to believe the impossible. *Mar 9:23 Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.*

The bravery and strength came from the willingness to ask and to admit our own inability. *2Co 12:9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

Bravery deserves recognition and as our text says “will bring you great rewards”. God recognises bravery with the Christ Cross!

The Road to Perdition

Heb 10:38 Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. Heb 10:39 But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

The word perdition means loss or destruction. People who draw back from God's way end up on the road to perdition. *Mat 7:13 Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereto: Mat 7:13 Go in through the narrow gate. The gate to destruction (or perdition) is wide, and the road that leads there is easy to follow.* A lot of people go through that gate.

Oh how we like easy solutions and cheap grace? Don't rock the boat, don't be narrow minded, be accommodating, live and let live, agree to differ, it's not important all that matters is that we all love God! Such is the road to perdition. The Quakers recently opened a new carriageway on the road to perdition. They reinterpret the Bible in the light of contemporary life and hold religious blessings for same-sex couples who have had a civil partnership ceremony. This so called re-interpretation means we use the lowest standard as the basis of right and wrong.

There are people in this generation trying to make the entry requirements to God's kingdom as simple as possible. They are trying to turn the narrow gate into a broad gate. The great lie is that God will accommodate all beliefs and that means that what you believe is not that important in the first place. If Judaism is as good as Islam and that is as good as Eastern orthodox then take your pick. You are just going to the same destination on a different bus! Some of those beliefs do not need a cross or blood and many do not even need a saviour because you can do that yourself!

Can all of this be true? The just shall live by faith we are told but what faith? *Gal 3:11 But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.Gal 3:26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.* Now there it is, Faith in Jesus Christ, The narrow gate. *Joh 10:7 Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.*

Jesus will call all these false ways, false religions and false leaders, thieves and robbers. They steal from you the truth and they rob God of His glory. *Heb 10:29 Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath*

counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

When we move into the next chapter (11) we shall see Faith in action. What faith compelled the saints of old to achieve. You can replace the word "faith" with "Christ" and it still makes sense. No wonder God has no pleasure in those who withdraw from Christ. Christianity is about the son of God. *Joh 12:32 And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.* Faith is about focusing on Christ and as we shall see in our next study Faith in Christ gives the substance to the unseen and the unknown. He has been there and He has revealed it to us.

What this is saying is that without Christ you cannot make sense of anything. We would know nothing of creation, the afterlife, the fallen nature of man, the unseen world of the afterlife or the nature of the soul. No wonder the just live by faith! We are dead without it.

Faith 1

*Heb 11:1 Faith makes us sure of what we hope for and gives us proof of what we cannot see. CEV
Heb 11:1 Now faith is the substantiating of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Darby*

Faith is not sight. Faith is not based on mere sensory perception or human reasoning. Paul says, *2Co 5:7 (For we walk by faith, not by sight:).*

Faith is not mental assent and not mere human hope. John Wesley warned in his time that there was a dangerous substitute for faith that he called "mental assent." He was caught in this dangerous trap and only escaped after failing as a missionary in America. Faith is of the heart (human spirit) and not merely the head (human reason). Simply agreeing that God exists and that his Word (the Bible) is true is not Biblical faith. James states *Jas 2:19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.*

Faith is not natural human faith. In order to function in life we must exercise a natural faith. We have faith in natural laws such as gravity and inertia and assume that they will work the same every day. If the universe were unpredictable and untrustworthy chaos would reign and life as we know it would be impossible. We trust inanimate machines. By turning an ignition key, flipping on a light switch or boarding an aircraft we exercise faith in machines. We trust vegetables and animals - we assume they will perform according to our past experience. We trust other human beings. This is not the faith we are speaking of.

Saving faith is a gift. You cannot forge it, fake it or buy it. *Eph 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:* The faith to live the Christian life is a gift also. Hebrews 11 details the exploits of believers who had the faith to perform actions that were guided by God. This faith in action is not wishful thinking.

I have come across many false prophecies that are not generated from faith but from wishful and hopeful thinking. They reflect what people want to happen rather than what God has said will happen!

The practical faith that we are talking about comes from God's word. It is a challenge to us to act on God's instruction. Abraham was challenged many times in his life by God. It is said of Abraham by Paul: *Rom 4:20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; Rom 4:21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.*

We shall look in more detail at Abraham's faith and its outworking but what is characteristic of faith is that it is a window that God opens up to us to encourage us to act. It gives substance and evidence to what God expects from us. In this sense too faith may be seen as prophetic telling us what to do. When Abel offered a better sacrifice did he do so because he made a lucky guess and Cain was unlucky? *Heb 11:4 By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.* I think that it means that Abel was guided by faith because God had told him what was expected. I see no reason why Cain should not have had that information but he did not act upon it. Cain did not have faith. *Rom 14:23 for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*

Faith 2

Heb 11:3 Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. Heb 11:3 πιστεὶ νοούμεν κατηρτισθαι τους αἰωνας ρηματι θεου εις το μη εκ φαινομενων τα βλεπομενα γεγονεναι

Remember how we defined faith as the revelation of Christ to us. *Eph 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Eph 3:17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,.* When God in Christ comes to us He opens our minds to understand things that we did not believe before. *1Jn 5:20 And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ.* This is the true God, and eternal life. Faith opens doors of understanding.

That faith will cause us to understand that God spoke and the worlds became. No Christian can be an evolutionist because that is a denial of God's revelation. *Gen 1:1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.* It shows a mind not in harmony with the mind of Christ.

At first glance of the verse before us we may think that we are looking at the creation of the physical Universe. We certainly agree that God created the Heavens and the Earth. *Psa 148:1 Praise ye the LORD. Praise ye the LORD from the heavens: praise him in the heights.* I would suggest however that there is more in view here than the physical fabric of the Universe. The word for "worlds" is Aeon, a period of immeasurable duration. Literally "ages", all that exists in time and space, visible and invisible, present and eternal. When we say the Lord's Prayer, *Mat 6:13 For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.* We are saying "unto the Aeons". That is the word used here for worlds.

It would seem to embrace the structure of time itself. Each age, all history, all creation was framed by the word (rhema not logos here) or utterance of God. It was "fitly formed and consolidated",

including the creation of the single parts and the harmonious organisation of the whole and the continual providence which maintains the whole throughout all ages. "As creation is the foundation and a specimen of the whole divine economy, so faith in creation is the foundation and a specimen of all faith [Bengel]."

We as Christians understand so much more "by faith" than other beings. They see change and decay, a universe expanding and dying. They do not see that the underlying plan or framework is like rails steadily leading history to its predicted conclusion, the glory of Christ and the triumph of the saints.

The ages were framed from things which cannot be seen. It seems to anticipate the physics of matter and antimatter. When matter and antimatter come into contact with one another they are both annihilated in a sort of balancing act. It is what we call creation ex nihilo, creation out of nothing out of annihilation.

This age is structured. All in it is designed to test faith. *Psa 8:4 What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?* We shall share another ministry on this incredible subject. God is in the detail, whatever the largeness or the smallness of His creation. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fHrXxYy8s8I> How great our God is.

Faith 3

Heb 11:7 By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

It is not surprising that the story of Noah and the global catastrophe should be embedded in cultures all around the world. I have identified over 100. What separates the myths from the facts? The story is validated by Christ where it is used as a simile for the end times and coming judgement. *Mat 24:37 But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*

Peter uses the story to illustrate baptism. *1Pe 3:20 Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. 1Pe 3:21 the like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:* Because of the way that the New Testament uses the story of Noah we can identify with the man. In fact more than that we are each like Noah in this age. We are building on the warnings of God.

Everything which Noah did in reference to the threatened deluge was done in virtue of simple faith or belief of what God said. It was not because he could show from the course of events that things were tending to such a catastrophe or because such an event had occurred before making it probable that it would be likely to occur again or because this was the common belief of men and it was easy to fall into this himself. It was simply because God had informed him of it and he put unwavering reliance on the truth of the divine declaration.

Gen 6:13 And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Again we come back to faith as an open revelation from God. When Noah began building that boat all the people around him were being given a warning which they ignored. When the creatures of the earth rolled up to enter, nobody took any notice.

Luk 17:27 People were eating, drinking, and getting married right up to the day when Noah went into the big boat. Then the flood came and drowned everyone on earth. This ark was a monument to their judgement. It was a gravestone for the world. *Heb 11:7 By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.* *Heb 11:7 Because Noah had faith, he was warned about something that had not yet happened. He obeyed and built a boat that saved him and his family. In this way the people of the world were judged, and Noah was given the blessings that come to everyone who pleases God.* CV

The world in our day is also without excuse. In the story of Lazarus and the rich man realising the truth of eternal damnation, he requests that Abraham rouse his brothers to the truth of what is going to happen to them. *Luk 16:29 Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.*

Moses is good enough says Abraham. If they cannot believe him then there is no persuading them. *Luk 16:31 And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.* If men want to know what is going to happen then open the book. The Bible. It is all spelled out in there. I don't have to justify it or explain it or interpret it to any man. It is its own monument. Noah saved his family, not simply because he believed God but because he built on that word.

Faith 4

Heb 11:10 Abraham did this, because he was waiting for the eternal city that God had planned and built.

The word "Perspective" (from Latin perspicere, to see through) is an approximate representation on a flat surface (such as paper) of an image as it is perceived by the eye in 3D. Faith gives you a perspective on life. It helps you to see through and beyond what is here.

One of the first exponents of perspective in art was the Florentine artist and mathematician Paolo di Dono more popularly known as Uccello for his love of painting of birds. Paolo Uccello (born Paolo di Dono, 1397 – 10 December 1475, the year Michelangelo was born) was an Italian painter and a mathematician who was notable for his pioneering work on visual perspective in art.

His contribution to art was the concept of the "vanishing point". The eye is drawn into the picture and into the far distance. Faith should do the same thing to us!

Abraham didn't put down roots. He didn't build a house for himself or his family. *Heb 11:9 Because Abraham had faith, he lived as a stranger in the promised land. He lived there in a tent, and so did Isaac and Jacob, who were later given the same promise.* For Abraham this life had no permanence and so he reflected that in the way he lived his life. Faith removed Abraham from this life ahead of his time. He was living his life in anticipation of the day that he would move into the reality of that which God had promised him.

We might say that a distinguishing trait or characteristic of a Christian is that he has an eye for the future. Peter was concerned with the NOW not what God was doing in the long term. *Mat 16:23 But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.* Peter had no vision of the death and the benefits of Christ in the future.

Most of us have heard the phrase, "Some people are so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good." This quote originated from a man by the name of Oliver Wendell Holmes. It is not true. If we take our rightful place - *Eph 2:6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:* we shall be "So Heavenly Minded that We are of Earthly Good." Many Christians want to display their Christianity in some way. Let Christ in you display it but don't expect it to work if you are working from earth rather than heaven.

For many people retirement is their goal in life and that's where it all ends. That's how far they look forward and many of their expectations are totally unreal. Today's average personal pension fund amounts to £40,000 at retirement, which at current annuity rates will produce an income of just £2,000 a year. What they expect is not matched by how they plan. Abraham did not plan for retirement he planned for Heaven.

He knew that earth could afford no permanent residence for an immortal mind and he looked for that heavenly building of which God is the architect and owner, in a word he lost sight of earth that he might keep heaven in view. And all who are partakers of his faith possess the same spirit, walk by the same rule and mind the same thing.

It is said later in Hebrews that: *Heb 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.* It wasn't just personal they spoke about it. They confessed that they were just passing through on a journey to another life.

Just like us.

Faith 5

Heb 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

What do we mean “believe that he **is**?” He is the verb “to be”. He is what? If you come to God it must logically suggest that you believe that there is a God, otherwise why are you going to Him? I think that it means more than the existence of God, it means all that God says that He is. When Moses meets God at the burning bush he is at a loss as to how to describe Him. *Exo 3:14 Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.*

The verb “to be” is again used to describe God. It is Jehovah the self-existent one. How appropriate it is that God describes Himself as the one who is life and existence? There is a huge difference between a collection of complex molecules and life. When I die, I will for a short while, have the same chemical composition but it will not be life. What has happened? The organisation has gone! When God made man and gave him a soul it was an act of organising matter, dust. When that organisation fails we die.

God is the organiser of life, the great I AM. Everything around us declares His glory. *Rom 1:19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. Rom 1:20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:* And look what God did to those who rejected this revelation. (Read Romans 1). You have here an explanation of why the world is in the state that it is in. The things we condemned in the past are now forgiven and acceptable (See the case of Alan Turin). How can God be pleased?

When people do not accept God as He is and make Him to be something or someone else He is not pleased. How do you feel if someone portrays you as you are not, misrepresents you or says things about you that are false? Does that make you happy? Of course not. Also think how you feel if your loved ones are misrepresented. Remember the six things that God hates. *Pro 6:16 These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: Pro 6:17 A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, Pro 6:18 An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, Pro 6:19 A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.*

How often was Christ deliberately misrepresented? *Luk 7:33 For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine; and ye say, He hath a devil. Luk 7:34 The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!* What did His Father think of this? To misrepresent Christ is also a sin. *Joh 14:1 Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.*

Without “faith” in God - in his fidelity, his truth, his wisdom and his promises He is not pleased. And this is as true in other things as in religion. It is impossible for a child to please his father unless he has confidence in him. It is impossible for a wife to please her husband or a husband a wife unless they have confidence in each other. Trust is the foundation of a relationship. The requirement of

faith or confidence in God is not arbitrary, it is just what we require of our children and partners in life and friends as the indispensable condition of our being pleased with them.

Just as you reward those with whom you are pleased so does God. It is the remuneration of faith, the reward of faith. That is not just in the life to come, it is in this life also.

Faith 6

Heb 11:11 Even when Sarah was too old to have children, she had faith that God would do what he had promised, and she had a son. CEV Heb 11:11 Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Her husband Abraham was almost dead but he became the ancestor of many people. In fact there are as many of them as there are stars in the sky or grains of sand along the beach.

Sarah is the half-sister of Abraham, Nahor and Haran. *Gen 20:12 And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife.* Sarah is the fourth woman mentioned by name in the Bible and the first in the line of Seth.

From שָׁרֵר (sarar) rule, reign, be princely, govern. The feminine derivation שָׁרָה (sara hence Sarah) is used for royal ladies of the court. Before the conception of Isaac Sarah was called Sarai, meaning my princess. Possibly the name-change indicates a step from local to global or specific to general. *Gen 17:15 And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. Gen 17:16 I will bless her, and you will have a son by her. She will become the mother of nations, and some of her descendants will even be kings.*

Sarah was given a promise. Does faith in a promise make it happen? Not necessarily! *Rom 3:3 For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?* Did Lazarus have faith to come from the dead? Faith or belief is sometimes the acknowledgement of the truth not a mechanism that triggers events.

We learn from Genesis that Sarah at first treated the Divine message with ridicule judging it to be absolutely impossible, not knowing then that it was from God and her age and circumstances justified this for humanly speaking such an event was impossible but when she knew that it was God who said this it does not appear that she doubted any more but implicitly believed that what God had promised he was able to perform. *Gen 17:19 And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him. Gen 21:2 For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.*

Faith worked to Sarah's advantage because it strengthened her through the coming pregnancy and birth. She would not be a victim of circumstance. Faith was God's gift to Sarah to help her. I believe that the same was true in Joseph's life. *Gen 50:20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.* The same may be said of Jesus. *Heb 12:2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that*

was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Faith helps us endure because it gives us a window on the future. It cannot change that future because that has been determined. *Rev 1:1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John:* The only way that prophecy can work is if the future is certain!

We receive the same faith when we see Gods' promises for life and the end of this age. It will not take us by surprise because we have been told in advance and if we receive it correctly it will strengthen and encourage us in these last days.

Faith 7

Heb 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Gen 1:1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. Why? It was the staging ground for an even greater display of God's glory. Planet earth was a staging post for a greater and more glorious creation. As the text says these faithful saints were the aliens (zenos - strangers) on earth. They were on a pilgrimage, that is a journey to a sacred place.

They had been looking for something future which they did not obtain during their lifetime and died believing that it would yet be theirs. Now God warns us against some means of looking into the future. *Deu 18:10 There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer.* I believe that it is because He wants us to go directly to Him for our futures not to man.

It was similar to the tree in the garden. *Gen 2:17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.* I do not think that God was against us knowing good and evil. This is in effect the knowledge of the LAW. *Rom 7:7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. Rom 7:8 But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. Rom 7:9 For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.* It was the method of acquiring the knowledge that was wrong and the devil by-passed God.

When Saul stopped listening to God and God stopped speaking to him. *1Sa 28:6 And when Saul enquired of the LORD, the LORD answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets.* As a result, he resorted to asking a witch.

I often think how terrible life would be without a certain future in Christ. What do people think about when they have no knowledge of the future? How do they survive life? For Christians the world to come is a sustaining vision that lifts us above the earth.

There is a TV Sci-Fi series called Flashforward. It is about a mysterious event that causes everyone on the planet to simultaneously lose consciousness for 137 seconds during which people see what appear to be visions of their lives approximately six months in the future—a global “flashforward”. The series is about the confusion that it causes in their lives especially those who saw nothing! The dead. God is gracious not to show us the future of this life but of the life to come, a place of great comfort. *Rev 21:4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes;*

These saints did more than just view the future, they embraced it. That is they saluted it, they greeted it and they welcomed it. They wanted it now! This is the Christian attitude. *Php 1:23 For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:* I think that we should anticipate it as we do a holiday. The destination is fixed, our bags are packed, our tickets are booked and we are sitting in the house waiting to go.

I know that this is harder when you are young and have a life before you and sometimes it is hard for older people. The reality is that your future is elsewhere and that is where you are going.

Faith 8

Heb 11:16 But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

That's why God wasn't ashamed for them to call Him their God. He even built a city for them. Abraham had been promised that Isaac his only son would continue his family. But when Abraham was tested, he had faith and was willing to sacrifice Isaac.

Another famous Abraham (Lincoln) said “I can see how it might be possible for a man to look down upon the earth and be an atheist, but I cannot conceive how he could look up into the heavens and say there is no God.” How true this is when we look at what is going on around us on this earth. It often leads to the exclamation “how can there be a God that allows all of this evil and suffering”?

It discouraged Asaph. *Psa 73:12 Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.* Yet it was this same Asaph who noted. *Psa 50:6 And the heavens shall declare his righteousness: for God is judge himself.* It was a different picture when looking up to when looking down. As we saw last time it is the view of this future that sustains us on the journey through this life.

On that journey God will often test us. If you ever ask to be tested to test your Christianity I say you are foolish (Put us NOT to the test). Abrahams test seems cruel. Having got to old age he has a son and then after a few years is told to sacrifice him? I often wonder how the Jews viewed having children? I think of Hannah who gave the child away. *1Sa 1:27 For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of him:* I wonder if we have in some way missed something

about children? It seems that God has a greater claim upon them than we do and parents of old realised that. *Psa 127:3 Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.*

Abraham's view on the issue of offering his son was probably quite different from ours. He did not look at the death, he looked at the resurrection. He had that great confidence that although his earthly hands were small God's hand was huge. *Heb 11:19 Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead;* This is the God who breathed stars. This is the God who is in the DNA. This is the God who made man out of a handful of dirt. In view of that I can see that resurrection is not something that God would not find difficult to do. How powerful is your God?

What should concern us is how can we get that strength that filled Abraham? How do we get to that level of confidence? I think that Abraham had spent time familiarising himself with what God was capable of doing and how God worked. Faith grows with knowledge just as a child grows with food. Abraham took time to fill his life with those things that would sustain him in the evil times. *Ecc 12:1 Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;*

It is better and easier to build that relationship with God in youth before the evil days come. Grumpy old men were clearly an issue millennia ago. I know that in these days there is so much distraction and so much trivia which requires much less effort to absorb. I cannot for the life of me understand why people indulge in crosswords, Suduko or Wii-training? If you want to give your brain a workout there are lots of interesting things to learn about God and His Creation. These other trivia will not help you when "the evil days come". Abraham is an example to us of preparedness and a life lived in understanding of God.

Faith 9

Heb 11:20 Isaac had faith, and he promised blessings to Jacob and Esau. CEV Heb 11:20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. AV

The origin of faith is God's word. *Rom 10:17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* God alone is the source of all knowledge of Himself and His works. Does having faith mean that we understand the Word that comes with it? Faith does not always mean understanding, I believe that God created all things but I have no understanding as to how He did it. *1Co 13:12 For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.* The word "darkly" in the Greek is literally "enigma". We see enigmatically or mysteriously and certainly not with clarity.

We can all sympathise with that. *Mar 9:24 And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.* Faith is sometimes like a slender rope that anchors us on the cliffs of life. We just hope that it will not snap and we cry for help. Some people have bigger ropes than others and have no fears, others are not so. *Mat 6:30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?* Jesus is not deriding their faith. In the original "little faith" is one

word, littlefaiths (ολιγοπιστοί). How much more will he clothe you littlefaiths? It is almost a term of endearment and encouragement.

Isaac had lived in the shadow of his father Abraham. Abraham was a hard act to follow. Isaac had seen this faith at Moriah when he was the subject of the sacrifice. He lived in the shadow of this faith when his father chose his wife. Isaac no doubt heard the tales of his father's battles and the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah. I wonder if his father Abraham had let his son's faith grow or had even encouraged it to grow.

I am sure that Isaac was a gentle and naive soul. He had two sons, twins Jacob and Esau, who I would suggest were not identical. *Gen 25:25 And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau.* Esau was a rebel and his antics a grief of mind to his parents. *Gen 26:35 Which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah.* Jacob was cheat who tricked his brother out of his birthright. *Gen 25:31 And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright.* *Gen 25:32 And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?* *Gen 25:33 And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob.* *Gen 25:34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright.*

Now we head to the climactic event where the twins get their father's final blessing. Again Jacob cheats by dressing as his brother with the collusion of his mother. *Gen 27:6 And Rebekah spake unto Jacob her son.* Rebekah seems to show disloyalty to Isaac. The outcome of this is that the blessings appear to go to the wrong persons but our text says that Isaac did it in faith? How can we explain his disappointment with Faith? *Gen 27:33 And Isaac trembled very exceedingly, and said, Who? where is he that hath taken venison, and brought it me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him? yea, and he shall be blessed.* Isaac would have no doubt intended differently but he could not change God's purpose.

I take us back to the thought at the beginning, which is that faith often outworks in ignorance. Isaac acted in faith that would become a reality in a sense a prophetic faith. Isaac as a type of God in electing. *Rom 9:13 As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.* *Mal 1:2 I have loved you, saith the LORD.* Yet ye say, *Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob,* *Mal 1:3 And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness.* Not loved less for what could be worse than being set aside by God. Hell is not about being loved less. It is about not being loved at all. Jacob was not a particularly savoury character but he was chosen (elected) by God. Esau was not and there was nothing Isaac could do about it.

Faith 10

Heb 11:22 And right before Joseph died, he had faith that God would lead the people of Israel out of Egypt. So he told them to take his bones with them.

This story ends the book of Genesis, the book that started with the birth of the Cosmos and ends with the birth of a Nation. Israel. (Gen 50). It must have seemed very strange to his family to be told

that they would be leaving Egypt. They had enjoyed prosperity and safety so what could possibly happen to change all of that? How would you feel if you had a death bed prophecy that you would be moving to another country when you were happy here?

Sometimes you think that faith only applies in life but here is faith in death. Joseph's faith lives beyond the grave. He still speaks of deliverance from his coffin. It is also as if Joseph is saying I am alive. I am still with you and where you go I will go. In that he is like Christ. *Joh 12:26 If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.*

It seems to me that it is neither here nor there where you are buried, because God knows and will raise you again. Joseph though is making a symbolic point. There are the dead and the dead. He wants to be buried with the faithful dead in the Promised Land. It's similar to the non-conformists who wanted to be interred outside of the Church of England (Bunhill/Bone-hill fields). His sarcophagus would be a reminder that they were going somewhere else out of Egypt.

Egypt is symbolic of this world. *Rev 11:8 And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.* Egypt and Sodom were twin cities; probably London and many other cities would be well matched. We need reminding that this is not all that there is or even what life is about. There is a place beyond this seemingly settled world and Joseph used his death to encourage God's people to see that.

Joseph in a manner expressed his faith in the immortality of the soul and the general resurrection of the dead. He was a comfort to his family. How often at funerals there is a struggle to express any hope about the deceased. The vicar shuffles around to find some words about someone he never even knew. He mouths the words "In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ", which clearly do not apply because the person never believed in the first place. What wicked hypocrisy most funerals are.

Not so Joseph. He tells them where he is going. Like Paul he is saying in a way. *2Ti 1:12 For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.*

I wonder if the dead in hell have eyelids. People close their eyes in this world to shut out the visions of truth. They shut their minds to the reality of God despite the many evidences around them. Will God let them shut out the sights and sounds of the rewards of their disobedient lives?

Joseph was at peace and at rest. His remains were not until they too were in the Promised Land. *Jos 24:32 And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem.*

Faith 11

Heb 11:23 Because Moses' parents had faith, they kept him hidden until he was three months old. They saw that he was a beautiful child, and they were not afraid to disobey the king's orders.

The background to this story is given in the first chapter of Exodus. The Egyptians were feeling threatened by the rapid growth of the Israeli population. To solve the problem they introduced Gendercide which is the systematic killing of members of a specific sex, either males or females. In this case the males. The Hebrew midwives refused to commit this deed and put themselves in great danger because of their disobedience.

They lied about why they let the boys live and this raises an interesting question. "Do people intent on evil have a right to the truth?" *Pro 19:5 A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape.* Is this absolutely true? Rahab lied to save two men. *Jos 2:4 And the woman took the two men, and hid them, and said thus, There came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were:* Theft may be necessary sometimes. *Pro 6:30 Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry; But if he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; he shall give all the substance of his house.*

I am not saying that lying and theft are matters of indifference. As a general rule of everyday life laws are to be obeyed but there are some circumstances that take men beyond the scope of these laws. There are times to make difficult choices and in these the overriding principle is mercy and goodness. *Mat 12:1 At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat.*

Are you prepared to disobey the laws of kings for the greater good to save life? When kings disobey God we disobey kings. As Peter and John said when forbidden to preach the Gospel of Christ. *Act 4:19 Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.*

One of the things that you notice about these characters of faith in Hebrews chapter 11 is that they all do some outstanding things that are worth recording in the Bible. Their faith takes them beyond the normal circumstances of life and throws them into strange, difficult and sometimes dark places. What lights their way is faith.

Moses parents were put in this impossible "lose-lose" situation we have come to call Catch-22. Catch-22 is a satirical, historical novel by the American author Joseph Heller first published in 1961. The novel set during the later stages of World War II from 1943. It follows Yossarian, a U.S. Army Air Forces B-52 bombardier and a number of other characters. Within the book, "Catch-22" is a military rule, the self-contradictory circular logic that for example prevents anyone from avoiding combat. Catch-22 specified that a concern for one's safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind. Ivor Orr was crazy and could be grounded. All he had to do was ask and as soon as he did he would no longer be crazy and would have to fly more missions. Orr would be crazy to fly more missions and sane if he didn't but if he was sane he had to fly them. If he flew them he was crazy and didn't have to but if he didn't want to he was sane and had to. "Catch-22" is common idiomatic usage meaning "a no-win situation"

Moses parents were in a “Catch-22” situation. Faith got them out of it.

Faith 12

Heb 11:24 Then after Moses grew up, his faith made him refuse to be called Pharaoh's grandson. He chose to be mistreated with God's people instead of having the good time that sin could bring for a little while. Moses knew that the treasures of Egypt were not as wonderful as what he would receive from suffering for the Messiah and he looked forward to his reward.

We might call this study “a life in perspective”. What really counts in life? It was a murder that precipitated Moses into the situation where he made this choice. *Exo 2:11 And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens: and he spied an Egyptian smiting an Hebrew, one of his brethren. Exo 2:12 And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand.*

Moses was in the position of living the life of a pampered prince while God's people were making bricks with straw. His show of sympathy in protecting the Israelite and murdering the Egyptian did not alter his position. The next day the brawling Israelites challenged his motives. Moses was clearly not viewed as an Israelite. It forced Moses' hand and he left the land of Egypt. Did he jump or was he pushed?

Hebrews suggests that it was a noble and conscious decision to leave the palace. Exodus suggests it was a fearful escape from death at the hands of the King of Egypt. When you look at some other characters of the faith you think well, they didn't live particularly good lives how come all this faith is attributed to them? *Heb 11:32 And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets:* Perhaps it is because faith starts as a seed and grows into something better later. I am sure that the positions described in Hebrews are the matured views of faith, faith from the end not the beginning. Casting an eye back over life we see the Divine hand and say “God meant it unto me for good”.

In the wake of the murder Moses must have been caused to focus very strongly on who he was and what he would become in life. He had to shed one of his double lives. He either had to be an Egyptian or an Israelite but not both. Moses' flight out of Egypt into the wilderness led to his encounter with God at the burning bush but he was still reticent about his new role. *Exo 4:10 And Moses said unto the LORD, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.*

In many respects providence made the choices for Moses. If He hadn't been put in the river, if the princess hadn't been bathing, if the Egyptian hadn't been beating the Israelite, if no one had seen it, if God never appeared then what would have happened to Moses? Providence sometimes makes choices for us that become acts of faith.

Richard Feynman worked on quantum electrodynamics! He won the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1965 and solved the mystery of the Challenger Space Shuttle crash. He said, "I won't have anything to do with the Nobel Prize... it's a pain in the... I don't like honours. I appreciate it for the work that I did and for people who appreciate it and I know there are a lot of physicists who use my work, I don't need anything else. I don't see that it makes any point that someone in the Swedish Academy decides that this work is noble enough to receive a prize - I've already got the prize. The prize is the pleasure of finding the thing out, the kick in the discovery, the observation that other people use it - those are the real things, the honours are unreal to me. I don't believe in honours, it bothers me, honours bother, honours is epaulettes, honours are uniforms, my papa brought me up this way. I can't stand it, it hurts me".

We need to appreciate just who we are and what we are in life. We need to be clear on what really counts. We are the king's children and this is not our world or our kingdom. Like Moses we often want to play on both teams. It's not possible.

Faith 13

Heb 11:27 By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.

Moses had seen the invisible God and wasn't afraid of the king's anger. His faith also made him celebrate Passover. He sprinkled the blood of animals on the doorposts so that the first-born sons of the people of Israel would not be killed by the destroying angel. Because of their faith the people walked through the Red Sea on dry land. But when the Egyptians tried to do it they were drowned.

Faith makes people do things. Faith is proactive. *Jas 2:17 Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.* If you look at faith in this chapter 11 it is faith in action. It is not a secret faith (I have my beliefs) but a faith that stands in opposition to the dictates of those who oppose God, who oppose God's word and His people. Would we have had the courage to stand in the face of opposition as Moses did if we were in a similar situation?

The dynamics of faith creates a special strength to do the seemingly impossible. Bunyan's pilgrim hymn, "He who would Valiant be" sets the vision. Since, Lord, Thou dost defend us with Thy Spirit, We know we at the end, shall life inherit. Then fancies flee away! With the vision of eternity clearly before him the pilgrim should not fear. This reality is seen at the martyrdom of Stephen. *Act 7:54 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,*

For many of our brothers and sisters around the world being a Christian has severe consequences now in the 21st Century. War is being waged (read accounts in "Open Doors"). What gives these extraordinary people the strength to go on? What has happened? Our text gives us a clue: Moses had seen the invisible God and wasn't afraid of the king's anger. If what you see in life frightens you then that is perhaps natural yet it should not be permanent. If you are frightened about your strength of faith you are not looking at the strength of God. Elisha's servant could not see God's

power. Ki 6:8 Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp. 2Ki 6:9 And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down. 2Ki 6:10 And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not once nor twice. 2Ki 6:11 Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not shew me which of us is for the king of Israel? 2Ki 6:12 And one of his servants said, None, my lord, O king: but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber.

We have seen over the past studies on Creation, the physical creation of God. His handiwork is awe inspiring. It is not all that He created because there is another realm: *Eph 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.* That is where the real battle is being fought using men as pawns in the war against God. Daniel's conversation with the angel confirms this. *Dan 10:12 Then said he unto me, Fear not, Daniel: for from the first day that thou didst set thine heart to understand, and to chasten thyself before thy God, thy words were heard, and I am come for thy words. Dan 10:13 But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia. Dan 10:20 Then said he, Knowest thou wherefore I come unto thee? and now will I return to fight with the prince of Persia: and when I am gone forth, lo, the prince of Grecia shall come. Dan 10:21 But I will shew thee that which is noted in the scripture of truth: and there is none that holdeth with me in these things, but Michael your prince.*

Alexander Maclaren the Baptist preacher said that "He who fights for God, never fights without God". I don't think that he meant going to fight another nation, supposedly in Gods' name. I think that he meant he who fights for what God stands for, for Gods' principles. Today we have in general a Christless Christianity of morals without the man Jesus. True Christianity, true faith is about standing against anything that lifts itself up against God and lifting God up in its place. *Joh 12:32 And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.* The enemy drowned in the Red Sea because they could not cross in faith and so will all who try to pass into the presence of God without faith.

Faith 14

Heb 11:30 By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.

Jericho is one of the oldest continually inhabited cities in the world and is located 258 metres (846 ft) below sea level. Excavations have revealed the Biblical story of its destruction. Kathleen Kenyon wrote in her excavation report in the early 1950's that: "The destruction was complete. Walls and floors were blackened or reddened by fire and every room was filled with fallen bricks, timbers and household utensils. In most rooms the fallen debris was heavily burnt." The story is told in the 6th chapter of Joshua.

Whatever physical mechanism brought the walls down (and we are not told) we are told that the spiritual cause was faith. *Mat 17:20 And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I*

say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. The Israelites believed that if they followed God's orders and walked around the city 6 days blowing trumpets, on the 7th day it would collapse. Why didn't God just flatten it with fire like Sodom and Gomorrah?

Faith is a strange thing. It asks us to believe the seeming impossible. A world created in 6 days, a boat that held the animals safe, a fish that swallowed and spat out a man alive. Yet these were all believed by Jesus. And beyond this, a man murdered and raised from the dead. Further in the future a world that will end. The trumpets are already sounding as we count down to that event. *Rev 10:7 But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.*

The "last post" was thus the last point of this inspection and the bugle call signalling that this post had been inspected marked the end of the military day. *1Co 15:52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.* Crossing the Jordan has always been linked to the entry into heaven so I suppose the destruction of Jericho is symbolic of the final judgement. Only those who believed, only those who had faith were allowed to enter.

Heb 4:1 Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. Heb 4:2 For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

Luk 21:8 And he said, Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them. Luk 21:9 But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not by and by. Luk 21:10 Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: Luk 21:11 And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven. Luk 21:12 But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake.

How do you feel about the state of the world? Want out? I was asked this week by some Jehovah's Witnesses if I was sad about what was going on in Haiti. I said I was not, rather I rejoiced at the signs of the times. *Luk 21:28 And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up (ἀνακύπτω unbend, that is, rise; figuratively be elated), and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh..*

Our faith in itself is a sign of the end times, just as the faith of Joshua was a sign of the destruction of Jericho. Our faith should cry out for the coming of the Lord because if we don't there is something seriously wrong with our spiritual state. *Luk 18:7 And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?* I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh shall He find faith on the earth?

Faith 15

Heb 11:31 Rahab had been a prostitute, but she had faith and welcomed the spies. So she wasn't killed with the people who disobeyed.

As we saw before that Rahab lied to protect the spies. This act is attributed to faith suggesting that truth has its limitations and can be overridden for a greater purpose. *1Ki 22:22 And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.* What is truth puzzled Pontius Pilate. *Joh 18:38 Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all.* Is there such a thing as an absolute truth or a universal unchanging truth? Is what is held to be true in this place the same elsewhere or is there some relativistic truth?

I came across an interesting argument about truth this week "We argue that the evolving practice of science in the contemporary world must be different from the classic view of disinterested - almost robotic - humans establishing objective claims to universal truth." It seems that we live in an age where truth is changing. The article by these academics further goes on to suggest:

- **To be warranted knowledge that is authoritative, reliable and guaranteed on the basis of how it has been acquired** - knowledge must emerge from a respectful process in which science's own internal social norms and practices are adhered to (Evolution?)
- **To be validated** - knowledge must also be subject to the scrutiny of an extended community of citizens who have legitimate stakes in the significance of what is being claimed (Evolution?)
- **And to be empowered** for use in public deliberation and policy-making, knowledge must be fully exposed to the proliferating new communication media by which such extended peer scrutiny takes place. (Evolution?)

Applying each of these arguments to Darwinian Evolution shows their falseness. In Greek mythology, Lethe (Λήθη) was one of the five rivers of Hades. Also known as the Ameles potamos (river of unmindfulness). The Lethe flowed around the cave of Hypnos and through the Underworld where all those who drank from it experienced complete forgetfulness. Alethia, truth, is that which cannot be forgotten, it is obvious.

Scientific truth which relies on hidden things such as a community that makes its own judgements and so called "experts" are no different to the Nazi SS who decided that Jews were inferior. For example Ernst Rüdin, director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute (KWI) for Psychiatry in Munich whose work to give race laws a scientific basis, was funded directly from Hitler's office, had chaired the committee's working group on 'racial hygiene and racial policies'. This panel set the criteria for the castration of criminals and the forceable sterilization of so called inferior women, particularly those with 'psychological' problems.

The historians have not yet been able to show whether Nobel laureate Adolf Butenandt, director of the KWI for Biochemistry in Berlin and a post war president of the Max Planck Society (MPS) allowed blood samples from Auschwitz to be analysed at his institute. Sound familiar? A bit like the IPCC and global warming? That's what "expert" groups can do. They decide what truth is or isn't.

In what way did truth as presented by Rahab differ from these other so called truths? Some people do not deserve the truth. *2Th 2:11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:* The reason for this denial of the truth to these people is that they rejected the Primary truth. "because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved". *Joh 14:6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*

Christians should be truthful but where that will undermine the purpose of God men have no right to it whatsoever, and God withholds it.

Faith 16

Heb 11:32 What else can I say? There isn't enough time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets.

Would you have made these people your friends and would you use them as an example of faith? Why did God pick them as examples?

Gideon (Judges 6) was a doubter so what faith here? Barak a general lacked faith to go alone into battle. *Jdg 4:8 And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go...* Samson (Judges 14) threw his faith away for a debauched life with a prostitute. Jephthah was an outcast in bad company (Judges 11). David is perhaps the worst of the list, an adulterer and murderer, a man of blood. *1Ch 28:3 But God said unto me, Thou shalt not build an house for my name, because thou hast been a man of war, and hast shed blood.* Samuel failed to discipline his sons and caused the Nation to rebel and ask for a King (1 Sam 8).

We often look to our heroes of the faith to be perfect. Failure in them seems to imply that we are bound to fail also and that is not particularly encouraging. So why did God give us such seemingly "poor" examples of faith? I think that we might find the answer by not looking at their faith but their forgiveness.

It would be difficult to fully understand the circumstances in which each of these men found themselves as they outworked the purposes of God. For example, God put a desire in Samson to pick a fight with the Philistines. *Jdg 14:3 And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well. Jdg 14:4 But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the LORD, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel.* We might ask if David would have ever married Bathsheba if he had not killed her husband Uriah and she was destined for the line of Christ.

God used the lives of these people to accomplish His eternal purpose. That is scary! We are expendable and some of the things that happen in our life are uncontrollable by us. We suffer collateral damage and we cannot override the power of God. *Rom 9:19 Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?* I cannot explain that to you but because it is written I believe it.

That is why I said that we should focus on the forgiveness of God. What counts when life ends is whether we are saved, whether we are forgiven. Whatever the circumstances that led to show how good or bad our faith was it was of His grace alone and for all of the time that was beyond our control. *Eph 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:*

I also note that all of these brothers before us made it home. God forgave them all over their wide spectrum of sin. Some of those sins we might gasp at and wonder how could a Christian do that? Surely there comes a point when forgiveness has run out and the case is totally lost. No and never forget that and never give up.

There is hope throughout life even to the last. Samson gathered himself up and avenged his life in a moment doing what he should have done before. *Jdg 16:28 And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once.*

It is a lesson in humility. You may not have done some of the sins of these men but you are no better than them and like them we rely on the continual forgiveness of God.... to the very end. *Rev 14:13 Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Put this in writing. From now on, the Lord will bless everyone who has faith in him when they die." The Spirit answered, "Yes, they will rest from their hard work, and they will be rewarded for what they have done."*

Faith 17

Heb 11:38 (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

You only have to read the papers to see who the world admires, who they think are worthy citizens. One popular list that I saw had the following in the Top 10: Elvis Presley, Bob Marley, Bill Gates, Albert Einstein, JFK, George Bush, John Lennon and Chuck Norris. It says a lot about who we value.

What a difference between man's judgment and God's judgement of a saint. The world is not worthy of those scorned persecuted saints, whom their persecutors reckon unworthy to live. The world is not worthy of their company, example, counsel or other benefits. They don't know what a saint is or the worth of a saint or how to use him. They hate and drive such away as they do with the offer of Christ and His grace. The world was so wicked that it did not want these people to live in it. These poor, despised and persecuted people living as outcasts and wanderers were of a character far elevated above the world

What does it say about us and our values when we make the popular choices we do? Apart from Jesus do you have someone in the Bible or some Christian that you admire as a role model? Do you have role models?

Why was the world not deserving or worthy of these people? Why did God raise them up in an unworthy world? What was their purpose? They were witnesses. *Heb 11:39 And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:* The Greek word for witness is

martyr. They were martyrs. They bore witness of the acts of God.

In a sense these witnesses opened a window of faith, a window showing the reality of God and His works. *Mat 5:14 Ye are the light of the world.* It was this that men objected to. *Joh 3:19 And this is the judgment, that light is come into the world, and men have loved darkness rather than light; for their works were evil.*

We often and mistakenly think that witnessing is going out, standing on corners preaching or giving out pamphlets. A bit like political campaigning, I think that the true witness holds the faith in an uncompromising way. This may be costly.

What would you do? In July 2008, two schoolboys from Stoke-on-Trent were punished by their comprehensive school teacher for refusing to pray to Allah. The boys from Alsager High School in Cheshire were given detention after they said they didn't wish to take part in the Muslim prayer as part of their Religious Education class. The boy's Religious Education teacher gave out prayer mats and told the Year Seven class (eleven to twelve-year-olds) to kneel down in prayer to the Muslim deity. (Marginalising Christians - Instances of Christians being sidelined in modern Britain The Christian Institute 2009.)

Here is another example. In 2006 a group of firemen from Glasgow including several Roman Catholics were punished by their employers for refusing to march in a gay pride rally. In previous years the rally had mocked the Roman Catholic Church. Instead of participating in the event the firemen handed out fire safety leaflets to members of the public on a nearby street. The men were consequently given written warnings and were ordered by their employer, Strathclyde Fire Board, to undergo 'diversity' training.

Don't worry. *Luk 12:11 When you are brought to trial in the Jewish meeting places or before rulers or officials, don't worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say. Luk 12:12 At that time the Holy Spirit will tell you what to say.*

Running the Race

Heb 11:39 And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: Heb 11:40 God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect. Heb 12:1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

We now see the reason why we have been introduced to all these Older Testament heroes of the faith. It was to lay a foundation and example for us in the 21st Century. We are not surrounded by a crowd of witnesses but a cloud of witnesses.

We see now that we are encompassed with two circles. A circle of witnesses of martyrs and a circle of hindrances. One is encouraged the other is to be discarded. One is discouraged by the

encouragement of the other. The witnesses shout to us, come on, the world isn't worth it. You cannot serve two masters.

The hindrances are of 2 sorts. Weights and Sins. Weights = ὅγκος where we derive the word oncology from are tumours. These tumours are the external hindrances of life; the sins are the internal hindrances of life

What are the weights we drag around? It is anything that slows our Christian progress or gets in the way of Christ developing in us. *Mar 10:29 And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, Mar 10:30 But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.*

We are in a race, so let us run with patience the race. *1Co 9:24 Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. 1Co 9:26 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air:*

It's a marathon and it is foolish to carry any extra weights when running a race. Weights are handicaps. In many horse races they have handicap events. Handicaps are races which bring together horses of varying levels of ability. The idea being that the better horses in the race carry more weight than the poorer horses. So in theory all horses in a handicap have an equal chance of winning if they all run to the best of their ability. We are exhorted to get rid of all handicaps. To the contrary in motor racing they go to extraordinary lengths to reduce vehicle weight. We are to be lightweight!

If you have a handicap it's of your own making. For some it is riches. *Mar 10:21 Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.*

The man knew that his riches were a burden to entering into Gods kingdom but he preferred to carry them rather than not. It was his personal problem that Jesus highlighted. Others have different problems. You can often get a hint of what they are because people get defensive about their problems. Don't forget "friends" may also hold you back. *Pro 13:20 He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.*

These cancers are also described as snares (to scandalise σκανδαλίζω). *Mar 9:42 And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.* Again the solution is to get rid of them. Give some thought this week to what limits your Christian performance.

Deceit

Heb 12:1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

We saw that there were external hindrances to Christian progress which are perhaps easier to identify than the internal hindrances, “the sin which doth so easily beset us”. Sin is deceitful. *Heb 3:13 But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.* We can be hardened by deceitfulness to resist change. I think it is that deceit that whispers in our minds “do it”.

1Ti 6:10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. This week, Sarah Ferguson the Duchess of York, grabbed a \$40,000 dollar down payment as cash for favours. There were no signs of her feeling wrong about it until it went public. She boldly commissioned the deed without any nervousness. After it went public she became devastated, regretful, sorry, fragile, desperate and in a very bad place! Why? What had changed? I suggest guilt at being discovered. When we sin, we seldom feel bad about it until it is brought to light. Just like Adam in the garden. *Gen 3:8 And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.*

As long as we can cover our tracks we feel strangely safe. *Exo 2:12 And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand. Exo 2:14 And he said, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian? And Moses feared, and said, Surely this thing is known.* One of the great horrors of the day of judgement is the revelation of the secrets of the heart. *Luk 12:2 For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Luk 12:3 Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.* The day of Judgement will be the day when the depths of human sin will be revealed - History with the lid off.

How though do we lay aside the sin which doth so easily beset us or which so easily entangles us? Is it something that we can do on our own? I think that the Bible evidence is that we must seek God’s help. *Psa 51:6 Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.*

Sometimes we are dull to the voice of the Spirit of God. The story of David and Bathsheba (2 Sam 12) shows how David was insensitive to his sin. It took a prophet to reveal it. Clearly David’s conscience was not working effectively it was burned out. *1Ti 4:2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy, cauterised as to their own conscience,*

We need God’s own Spirit to guide us. *Joh 16:13 Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall*

he speak: and he will shew you things to come. We should make it a part of our prayer life and meditation that God will graciously show us our sin, forgive us and protect us from evil.

That is a key area of prayer that Jesus taught us. *Mat 6:12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Mat 6:13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.* I think that this is probably the most neglected area of prayer. The prayer book of the Church of England puts it nicely: Dearly beloved [brethren], the Scripture moveth us in sundry places to acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness; and that we should not dissemble nor cloak them before the face of almighty God our heavenly Father; but confess them with an humble, lowly, penitent and obedient heart; to the end that we may obtain forgiveness of the same by his infinite goodness and mercy. And although we ought at all times humbly to acknowledge our sins before God; yet ought we most chiefly so to do, when we assemble and meet together to render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at his hands to set forth his most worthy praise, to hear his most holy word, and to ask those things which are requisite and necessary, as well for the body as the soul.

Looking Unto Jesus 1

Heb 12:2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

A new word entered the world's vocabulary after the resurrection of Christ. It was the word Christian = χριστιανοῦ. *Act 11:26 And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.* A Christian was a follower of Christ. There must have been something about those people in that church in Antioch that shouted "Christ". *Act 4:13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.* As Spurgeon said at the opening of the Metropolitan Tabernacle "I would propose that the subject of the ministry in this house as long as this platform shall stand and as long as this house shall be frequented by worshippers shall be the person of Jesus Christ".

The history of the church is littered with divisions. It was foretold that this would be so. *1Co 11:19 For there must also be sects among you, that the approved may become manifest among you.* Heresies or sects are part of the cleansing process whereby error is highlighted and put aside. The result is often that two groups continue whereas before only one existed. I see that there are two major issues on sects. One is error relating to the person of Christ. The other is related to prophecy or practice (see Brethren splits). I take the first as the most dangerous. When we undermine the person of Christ we are undermining His work. Let me illustrate.

Marcion was an early church leader born at the end of the first century AD. Marcion did not believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus but only in a spiritual resurrection, he was a Gnostic. Marcion's Jesus does say: "Look at my hands and my feet . . . a spirit does not have bones as you see I have". Tertullian claimed that Marcion interpreted it "as you see me having" to refer to "a spirit", not to "bones". This way Tertullian complained Marcion interpreted Jesus to mean that he was a spirit

body (as the disciples could see) and did not have bones. This is the view perpetuated by the Jehovah's Witnesses.

We are no longer looking to the historic Jesus. We are looking at a view of what someone thinks Jesus should be not what He is. We are not looking unto Jesus we are looking to man. By the way other evidence declaims the Jehovah's Witness view. *Joh 20:27 Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.* Jesus' return was corporeal not spirit.

Looking unto Jesus is far more than worshipping, it is creating the focal point of life. This is where we look to make sense of the world. Why is there so much evil? *Mat 17:15 Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water.* *1Jn 3:8 He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.*

Why do we die? *1Co 15:21 For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.*

How did we get here? *Joh 1:3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.*

I think that this "looking" must extend to all aspects of our lives. If we are looking to Jesus, then He must be looking at us in that moment. When we don't want to look at Jesus it is probably because we do not want Him to be looking at us in that moment. This is the focus for the Lord's Table.

1Co 11:26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.

Looking Unto Jesus 2

Heb 12:2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

I want to further illustrate this importance of this verse with two illustrations from life. I will call it "The tale of two Taylors". Religion often gets a bad name and deservedly so when its followers stop looking at Jesus. When the followers draw attention to themselves for their wicked conduct they take people's eyes from looking at Jesus. Intentionally or otherwise they are saying "look at me".

Do you remember the 80's long-running American serial of sex, cash and power - a show resembling some lurid made-for-TV mini-series that might be called God and Money? The PTL club. The PTL club (for Praise the Lord or People That Love) ministry were confronted at a public bankruptcy hearing by members of the flock that had supported the \$203 million religious empire created by its ousted leaders Jim and Tammy Bakker. Have you seen the showman Benny Hinn preaching the prosperity gospel to millions in his expensive suits urging you to give? Surely millions of people can't be wrong? Well it's a statement of human nature - **they can**.

1Pe 4:14 If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. 1Pe 4:15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. 1Pe 4:16 Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.

I read this week a story about an elder who sensed that the pastor was using the pulpit for self glorification. After much prayer he said to the pastor, "Jesus died on the cross but you are living by it". The pastor received the rebuke and repented. Moses was denied the opportunity to lead God's people into Canaan for this reason.

Num 20:10 And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? Num 20:11 And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. Num 20:12 And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them. They took much of the glory of this work of wonder to themselves "Must we fetch water?" As if it were done by some power or worthiness of their own. Moses was told to speak to the rock but they smote it. Num 20:8 Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink.

There is no doubt from history that it is a short step from being a good ruler to becoming a megalomaniac. Saul fell prey to this danger. *1Sa 15:17 And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel?*

It is suggested that the devil fell in this way. *Isa 14:12 How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! Isa 14:13 For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: Isa 14:14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Isa 14:15 Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.*

It may be this vision of the pit of hell that explains my first Taylor's demise.

"He was quieter for some moments then just before he died there came upon him an almost indescribable horror, the expression on his face was one of abject terror. He opened his mouth to speak however he did not actually say anything, his breathing very laboured and erratic. It was in this state that he died. It was clear to all present that something was revealed to Jim that caused such terror. Only he and the Lord know what it was. There was some discussion among those present later as to what would be released as to the circumstances of his passing however I did not remain in the room to find out the extent of those discussions.

The truth is that I was in some emotional turmoil as I had been deeply affected inwardly by what I had witnessed. To this day I have sought to understand but have accepted that the Lord has His own counsel and will reveal what is His pleasure in His own time.” Written by a member of Taylor family. So passed Jim Taylor leader of the exclusive brethren on the 14th October 1970.

James Taylor Jnr issued a continual stream of “directives” that regulated the behaviour of the Brethren in exacting detail, prohibitions against women working, wearing trousers, using makeup or cutting their hair. Prohibitions relating to facial hair on men and rules about working on Saturday or Sunday, required attendance at meetings, bans on public swimming, life insurance and organised sport. The list of rules numbers in the hundreds.

The second demise related to perhaps the most controversial event during James Taylor Junior’s leadership, and it occurred at Aberdeen in Scotland in July 1970 in the last year of his life. Taylor led a three-day meeting at Aberdeen and stayed at the home of James Gardner. Over the period other guests in the house noticed that the wife of one of the guests spent long periods alone in Taylor’s bedroom apparently with her husband’s blessing. Taylor led a meeting in the afternoon of Saturday 25 July 1970 where he appeared to be under the influence of alcohol. Audio tapes and a purported transcript of the meeting record Taylor slurring incoherently at times and using abusive and blasphemous language. He was dead within months. Taylor and the Exclusive brethren had stopped looking at Jesus.

The second Taylors demise occurred at the same time as the Baptist Union heresy (The BU was already becoming apostate at the end of the 19th century when Charles Haddon Spurgeon separated from it in protest in 1888). In the early 1970s, Michael Taylor principal of the Baptist Union’s Northern Baptist College addressed the London Baptist Assembly on the theme “How much of a man was Jesus?” He denied that Jesus Christ is God. He also denied the virgin birth, miracles and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Though many protested the man’s heresy the Baptist Union refused to discipline him or remove him from office.

In 1986, the Australian Beacon made the following observation about the Baptist Union - “It is a Union which harbours apostates and succours infidels while ostracizing faithful servants of Christ. It is a friend of Rome, a bed-fellow of idolaters and spiritists in its membership of the World Council of Churches. No true man of God could remain within it in good conscience”. About a hundred ministers with their churches resigned from the Union at that time but most of these discovered they could not survive on their own and rejoined the Union.

I remember these events that occurred a year before I became a Christian and they echoed on for many years. How was it possible to be a “Christian” and behave and believe in such a fashion? It is because people take their eye off of Christ and look to man. I think that this will be a danger in large congregations where the cult of self grows well.

My advice is never admire a person so much that you cannot question their judgement. The moment that you accept without question any pronouncement you have stopped looking unto Jesus. You are looking unto man. At that stage you are also looking into the abyss.

Looking Unto Jesus 3

Heb 12:2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

The rise of the anti-Christ. *Act 20:30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.* It was foretold that men would pervert truth. An example of this perversion lies in the teachings of the Christadelphians among others. They state that:

- Jesus is the Son of God and a human being, through his mother Mary (not pre-existent).
- Man is mortal, having no existence when dead.
- When Jesus returns, he will raise his "sleeping" followers from death and grant immortality to the faithful who have tried to live by God's precepts.

Are you looking at the real Jesus? Is your Jesus a man, born in sin to Mary, who did not exist before? Mine isn't. *Joh 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Joh 1:2 The same was in the beginning with God. Joh 1:3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. Joh 1:4 In him was life; and the life was the light of men. Joh 1:5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. Joh 1:6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. Joh 1:7 The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. Joh 1:8 He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. Joh 1:9 That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. Joh 1:10 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. Joh 1:11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not. Joh 1:12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Joh 1:13 Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. Joh 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*

Jesus is God and the pre-existent creator of life. He is God with us, Emmanuel. *Mat 1:23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. Joh 20:28 And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.* Not one word of rebuke that Thomas had misjudged Him is given.

The teaching of the afterlife is not detailed. *1Co 2:9 But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.* What is sure is that when man is raised at the last judgement he will not be sent back to sleep if he rejects Christ. The story of the rich man and Lazarus shows that there is no such thing as soul sleep and that men are conscious in punishment. People say that this is just a parable. I note

that when Jesus speaks in a parable, He says so. *Luk 15:3 And he spake this parable unto them, saying,* I think that the story of the rich man is a true story and has happened many times. Christ is the Bringer of life and immortality to light. *2Ti 1:10 But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel: Joh 5:26 For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself;*

Why would men pervert the image of Christ? Why would they have us look elsewhere? It is I think because they have the spirit of antichrist. *1Jn 2:18 Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. 1Jn 2:19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.* The devil does not have to work outside of the churches he already has that in control. The area to attack is inside the churches. I think that we should not fear attacks from without as much as we should from attacks from within. "They went out from us" or spread from us.

I do not see this as too difficult a task to achieve. I do not know many Christians who are actively involved in studying the truth for themselves. If they spent as much on books as they did on a TV licence they could have a good library and be educated. Instead they mainly content themselves with what they get on Sundays from the minister. There are few checks and balances built into this arrangement so it is quite easy to be mislead and error can be drip fed to the congregation. *2Co 4:4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.*

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804 - 1864) wrote an allegory "The Celestial railroad", depicting the radical distinction between "the broadness of contemporary Christianity" and "the narrowness of Biblical Christianity". The vast majority of Christian professors have abandoned the Bible's demanding lifestyle of the narrow way which alone leads to eternal life. A socially fashionable brand of 'easy religion' now masquerades as Biblical Christianity. Hawthorne's dream carries him off to Bunyan's 'City of Destruction' where to his surprise; he is told that a railroad has recently been built from the 'City of Destruction' to the 'Celestial City'. Sadly this railroad never arrives at its promised destination.

Looking Unto Jesus 4

Heb 12:2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

We use an expression "I am looking forward" to describe our anticipation of something pleasant that we will do. We seldom say, "I am looking forward to going to the dentist". As a boy I used to cope with going to dentist appointments by focusing on an image of me walking out of the dentist after treatment. I would focus on the future as a coping mechanism.

I think that this was what sustained Joseph in his prison cell. *Gen 50:20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people*

alive. Joseph had a vision of his future from a very early age. Gen 37:5 And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it his brethren: and they hated him yet the more. I believe that Joseph understood the meaning of those dreams because he was an interpreter of dreams. *Gen 40:8 And they said unto him, We have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter of it. And Joseph said unto them, Do not interpretations belong to God? tell me them, I pray you.* Joseph had an eye on the future.

Christians should also have an eye on the future. We have something to look forward to and that is why Christians should never be depressed. *2Co 4:8 We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;* as Paul later concludes. *2Co 4:17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;*

Some think this verse talks of Jesus' self satisfaction in view of all the honour which He would have at the right hand of God and the happiness which He would experience from the consciousness that He had redeemed a world. He was willing to bear the sorrows connected with the atonement. I don't think that it was just self satisfaction. It wasn't about God getting back to normal again after a cosmic outburst.

God could have decreed an eternity without a crucifixion and avoided all of this. In some sense God inflicted this wound on Himself and what could be more depressing than the prospect of a terrible death from whatever cause? So what made it a joy? I don't think that it was just a joy to return to what already existed but the joy of a future with his people. Think about that. Look around you and think "would I like to spend eternity with this lot?" How many people would you like to spend eternity with? Not many I bet?

Yet Jesus looked forward to the joy of saving men and of sitting at God's right hand to spend eternity with you! To spend eternity with me? Am I that good company? Something must happen between here and eternity to make me into someone who is worth spending eternity with? There must be some big changes in my future to make Jesus joyful in the prospect of eternity, to smile over the cross because there was a future with us?

This verse in Hebrews is recorded to give us hope in the sharing of that joy. That through His suffering we have a bright future to behold. When we meditate on this verse it also says something about us. If we receive that message it will give us the same joy of anticipation for the shared future.

Life is not about a downward spiral into old age. Robert Butler who died on Sunday July 4th aged 83 coined the term "ageism" and probably did more than any other individual to combat its effects. Much in Butler's view came down to attitude of society towards older people and crucially of older people towards themselves. He identified two broad groups – the "old old" who see themselves as frail and decaying and behave accordingly and the "new old" who lead active lives and feel no inhibition about indulging in such activities as scuba diving or sex. Old people who have, as he put it, "some reason to get up in the morning", live longer and healthier lives.

Well if that is true of the people in the world, what should the attitude of Christians be in the light of their future expectations?

Looking Unto Jesus 5

Heb 12:2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Some stories are heart warming like the current one about Tim Tebow. Never heard of him? You will for more than one reason. Tim is used to making headlines in the States. As a college football star quarterback with the Florida Gators he will soon be stepping up into the National Football League. But he is making news right now for his forthcoming appearance in a controversial commercial set to run during Sunday night's televised coverage of Super Bowl XLIV. Tim Tebow was born on August 14th, 1987 in Makati City in the Philippines, the son of Pamela (née Pemberton) and Robert Ramsey Tebow.

A conservative Christian group Focus on the Family have paid for a 30-second slot during CBS' coverage of the game. The advert will feature the story of Tim Tebow's mother, Pam. As a Christian missionary in the Far East, 23 years ago, she fell very ill while pregnant. While pregnant Pam suffered a life-threatening infection with a pathogenic amoeba. Because of the drugs used to rouse her from a coma and to treat her dysentery the foetus experienced a severe placental abruption. Doctors expected a stillbirth and recommended an abortion to protect her life. She ignored that medical advice and gave birth to a fifth child, her son Tim, the future football star.

This is an ad' with a not-so-subtle implied message that women who would decide to end a pregnancy should be ashamed. Tim Tebow, who is known to display Biblical line references on his playing uniform, has not shied away from the controversy stirred up by the ad: "I know some people won't agree with it but I think they can at least respect that I stand up for what I believe... my mom was a very courageous woman." Traditionally, the commercials broadcast during the Super Bowl have steered well clear of any polarising issues tending more to focus on humour and light-hearted whimsy and so a pro-life "advocacy ad" represents a major change. Women's rights groups have been calling on CBS to withdraw the ad'.

Terry O'Neill President of the National Organisation for Women (Now) told the BBC she thinks the Tebow ad' is totally inappropriate. "We can celebrate the ability of people like Pam Tebow to make her own healthcare decisions, to make decisions about her family and her future. And we do celebrate that. But we would also celebrate the same situation, a different woman with a risky pregnancy, if she decided to terminate that pregnancy - we would celebrate her ability to make her decision for her healthcare and her future. This is an ad' with a not-so-subtle implied message that women who would make a different decision, who would decide to end a pregnancy, they should be ashamed," she said.

We're not selling anything - we're celebrating families. It's an opportunity for us to reach a large audience with the many resources we have and that's the heart of what we do as a Christian ministry. Gary Schneeberger vice-president, "Focus on the Family" CBS, insists the script of the commercial has been approved and is "appropriate for air".

A 30-second ad' during the Super Bowl this year costs between \$2.5m and \$2.8m but for that money the commercial is expected to reach a watching audience in the US of around 100 million, a third of the country's population. Dave Kline is one of only four men to have covered all 44 Super Bowls and remembers the early days when the networks struggled to sell advert slots. He is uneasy about this change of stance on advocacy ads during the big game. "I'm not sure the time has come but there are people who do think the time has come. If they want to put the 'nearly-sainted' Tim Tebow on air, then there will continue to be an escalation, with more and more of these ads, pro-abortion, anti-abortion and anything else they can think of." Mr Kline said. 'Maximum impact'. While very little detail of what exactly is said in the ad' is known it is understood that the words "abortion" and "pro-life" do not feature.

Gary Schneeberger, a vice-president and spokesman for Focus on the Family has not given any more clues in recent interviews but has noted the anticipation the media interest has built up. "There has been a lot of speculation about what it is but we've never said exactly what the ad' is about, precisely because we want the impact of the slot to be on Super Bowl Sunday." Most of the folks having ads in the Super Bowl are trying to sell you something. We're not trying to sell a car, a soft drink or a web domain name. We're not selling anything - we're celebrating families. It's an opportunity for us to reach a large audience with the many resources we have and that's the heart of what we do as a Christian ministry," Mr Schneeberger said.

The Tebow ad' still looks likely to run this Sunday night - the reaction of Americans watching will determine if more of these advocacy ads are let near the huge Super Bowl audience in future.

I like people who challenge the odds for the right reasons. People who look beyond the immediate and short term to the future. These people are planners. I also think that these people sit down at the end of life without regrets. If you stick to what God says no matter how hard it is on you, you'll die without regrets. Tim's mum will never sit down and say "what if I didn't have that abortion". She didn't just think of herself.

If Jesus had thought of Himself we would not be here worshiping today. *Mar 14:35 And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. Mar 14:36 And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.*

What does it take to remove ourselves from the centre of the universe that revolves inexorably around us? There is a saying in the Talmud that "You don't see the world as it is. You see it as you are". That's why we don't see the world as it really is. We see it as we want it to be. To remove ourselves from the centre is an act of submission.

Psa 119:18 Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.

It's about consciously serving others rather than self-serving.

Looking Unto Jesus 6

I want to see the world as God sees it, that way I will be better prepared for life and better understand what is going on around me. *Pro 3:5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.* My understanding is flawed by sin. We need the blind spots removed. *Psa 119:18 Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.*

This verse in Hebrews 12 is not just about self-sacrifice it is about service. It's about consciously serving others rather than self-serving. It's about duty. *Luk 17:7 But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? Luk 17:8 And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Luk 17:9 Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. Luk 17:10 So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.*

I address you younger ones. How can you claim to be following Jesus when you do not follow the instructions of your parents? If Jesus had not followed instructions we would all be hell bound.

I don't think that duty should be seen as a misery. If we embrace our tasks in life with joy then they can become a pleasure. *Psa 40:8 I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.* I think that can apply to anything that we do. Yes even jobs we don't like. How? We see who we really work for. *Eph 6:5 Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ;*

We come back to the idea that if we are not at the centre of life and Christ is it will work better. What is so great about the story of Tim Tebow is that he supports his mum in the work she does. He respects all that she did for him and in some way he is paying her back. She did her duty to him and he is doing his duty to her.

Nice story and a great truth!

Looking Unto Jesus 7

Heb 12:2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

It is quite specifically stated here the right hand and not the left hand. Right (Gk δεξιός) hand. In the Middle Ages it was believed that when a person was writing with their left hand they were possessed by the Devil. This was uncommon particularly as there were fewer literate people. Left-handed people were therefore considered to be evil. In many European languages, "right" is not only a synonym for correctness but also stands for authority and justice: German recht, French droit, Spanish derecho, Portuguese direito; The right hand has also historically been associated with skill: the Latin word for right-handed is dexter, as in dexterity; in French, "gauche" means "left" and is also a synonym of "maladroit", meaning "clumsy". The Latin word sinistra originally meant "left" but

took on meanings of "evil" or "unlucky" by the Classical Latin era, and this double meaning survives in European derivatives of Latin, and in the English word "sinister".

We might ask which side are we on, left or right? *Mat 25:32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: Mat 25:33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Are we sheep or goats?*

Goats go to the left the side of judgment, the sinister side. To be on the right side is to be just that, on the right side - if we are seated with Christ. *Eph 2:6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: We too are at the right hand of God. We are beyond judgement. Rom 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*

The judgement has passed us by, passed over us. *1Co 5:7 Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:*

We are in the last days. The final act of history is outworking. *Heb 1:13 But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? Mar 14:62 And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*

When we see Christ seated on God's right hand we are seeing the long suffering of God. It reminds us of the time of Noah when God waited for the ark to be completed. *1Pe 3:20 Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.*

People were oblivious to the coming destruction. *Mat 24:37 But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Mat 24:38 For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, Mat 24:39 And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; Life went on as normal. I imagine many people in Pakistan suffered the same fate in the monsoon floods.*

History shows us many portents of judgements. On August 24th AD79 the city of Pompeii was devastated when Mount Vesuvius exploded. The Apostle Paul himself had passed within sight of Pompeii a few years earlier when he landed in the Bay of Naples at the town of Puteoli. *Act 28:13 And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli: Archaeology revealed many grim findings about life in Pompeii. Evidently due to its immorality, prior to or shortly after the destruction of Pompeii, one graffitist had scribbled "Sodom and Gomorrah" onto a wall near the cities central crossroads.*

Whether catastrophic events around the world are judgements of God or not, we should view them as reminders that one day it will be the Final Judgement.

Contradiction

Heb 12:3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

We often encounter contradiction. People will contradict our view and go against it. For us this happens because we are limited in our knowledge and sometimes we will be correct and at other times we will be wrong. Jesus was never wrong. He was constantly fighting the ignorance and bigotry of His day.

The great contradiction was as to who Jesus really was and it still is. *Luk 22:67 Art thou the Christ? tell us. And he said unto them, If I tell you, ye will not believe:* It shows us that no matter what signs and wonders, what miracles of resurrection are shown, unbelief has deep roots and those roots are in the blindness of the human soul. Know this that men are blind to the truth. *Mat 13:13 Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.*

How do you fight religious contradiction? By considering Him. What does it mean to “consider” Him? (Consider = ἀναλογίζομαι = a comparison between concepts). You use Jesus as an analogy. You find out how He did it and you do it the same.

The most important thing that I see with Jesus is His accurate use of scripture. It was a sword. *Mat 12:3 But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him;*

See also: *Mat 12:5 Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the Temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless? Mat 19:4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, Mat 22:31 But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, Mar 12:10 And have ye not read this scripture; The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner: Mar 12:26 And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? Luk 6:3 And Jesus answering them said, Have ye not read so much as this, what David did, when himself was an hungred, and they which were with him;*

The answers to life are in the word. *Psa 119:105 Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.*

Jesus had no problem with Creation. *Mat 19:4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, Noah Luk 17:26 And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. Or even Jonah and the fish. Mat 12:40 For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*

Because we do not approach controversy as Jesus did we often end up in a messy argument. We would argue creation from genetics whereas Jesus would quote scripture. Jesus doesn't justify scripture, He does not explain the scripture, He quotes it. I always remember one of Billy Graham's most famous phrase, "the Bible says..." He let the Bible speak instead of himself. He laid the scripture out before his audience and said listen to that.

You might ask why don't we just read scriptures on Sunday? Why have a ministry? Some of the early churches did in fact read large amounts of scripture (Chrysostom) but in the context of our verse we are dealing with sinners, not the church. In the church we expound the truth but that is not something that we can do easily outside. Churches are for believers. *1Co 14:23 If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?*

Paul's experience with the Greeks shows how difficult it is to start any sensible discussion with unbelievers. Remember Paul's task was to evangelise. *Act 17:21 (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)* His discourse is limited to a few facts. It is a statement of creation, man's duty to find God and the coming judgement of mankind. Short and to the point.

And let us not forget that the real battleground is spiritual. *Eph 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Eph 6:13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*

Fortunately God has given us armour as well as a weapon.

Chastening

Heb 12:7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chaseneth not?

The cycle of life is one of preparation and realisation. Part of that preparation for life involves "chastening" (chastening, Greek Παιδεία), does not mean specifically punishment, it was child rearing and particularly education. Since self-government was important to the Greeks, paideia, combined with ethos (habits), made a man good and made him capable as a citizen or a king. This education was not about learning a trade or an art but was about training for liberty and nobility.

I think that this is in line with what the writer of Hebrews has in mind. As I watched the home movies that we made all those years ago I saw you little souls growing under your parents watchful eyes. Now for you the preparation is nearing completion. Too soon for many of us but inevitable and necessary.

You may have at many times resented the chastening of your parents and when they said, "it was for your own good", you could not believe that was the truth. However you will find out for yourselves when you have your own children. *Pro 22:15 Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod*

of correction shall drive it far from him. Your parents were trying to save you from yourself. One day you will understand this and you will find that you have a great sympathy for your parents and their views. You may even become like them!

It would be a great shame if you throw this training off when you move out of your homes and go to University. Many that you meet there will do this. They will see the new found freedoms as an excuse to dispose of all of that training accumulated over the years. They will show contempt for the hands that reared them, the love and hardships endured by their parents that they could become good people. They will behave badly under the false idea that they have found freedom.

Freedom is not lawless. *Jas 1:22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. Jas 1:23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: Jas 1:24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. Jas 1:25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.*

The American Constitution starts “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” There follows a series of articles that define the structure of the nation. These are the founding laws and show that freedom, the Blessings of Liberty as it says are based on laws.

When we look into the mirror of freedom it shows us what we look like and what we should look like. That perfect law of Liberty that James speaks of is the Liberty or freedom found in Christ. Outside of Christ there is only bondage. *Gal 5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.* What many see as freedom is bondage. Remember that.

The reason that your parents have brought you up in the way they have is because they love you. They spend time on it because they love you. God does the same out of love. For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, He doesn't bother with the others because they are not his sons and daughters. They are bastards. *Heb 12:6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. Heb 12:7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? Heb 12:8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.*

For those who are neglected or abused the consequences are well documented. There are difficulties during adolescence. Studies have found abused and neglected children to be at least 25 percent more likely to experience problems such as delinquency, teen pregnancy, low academic achievement, drug use, and mental health problems (Kelley, Thornberry, & Smith, 1997). Other studies suggest that abused or neglected children are more likely to engage in sexual risk-taking as they reach adolescence thereby increasing their chances of contracting a sexually transmitted disease (Johnson, Rew, & Sternblitz, 2006).

According to a National Institute of Justice study abused and neglected children were 11 times more likely to be arrested for criminal behaviour as a juvenile, 2.7 times more likely to be arrested for violent and criminal behaviour as an adult, and 3.1 times more likely to be arrested for one of many forms of violent crime (juvenile or adult) (English, Widom, & Brandford, 2004).

Research consistently reflects an increased likelihood that abused and neglected children will smoke cigarettes, abuse alcohol or take illicit drugs during their lifetime (Dube et al., 2001). According to a report from the National Institute on Drug Abuse, as many as two-thirds of people in drug treatment programs reported being abused as children (Swan, 1998).

Abusive parents often have experienced abuse during their own childhoods. It is estimated approximately one-third of abused and neglected children will eventually victimize their own children (Prevent Child Abuse New York, 2003).

The results of careless parenting are obvious. God as our parent encourages us to take concern for our children and you are the result. *Pro 6:20 My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother:*

As you children leave us one by one, the parenting task draws to a close. I see those birds each year growing wearier by the day until the nest is flown. I expect that the parents then have a well deserved rest. Rest you should for there is little you can now do except trust to God to bless the work of your hands.

Corporal Punishment

Heb 12:4 Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. Heb 12:5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: Heb 12:6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

The focus of this section of Hebrews is to encourage us on earth to look to our family in heaven where we belong, our family in heaven. This life is harsh but not without purpose. God disciplines us for our own good and we in turn exercise discipline in our families. I want to open up this subject of discipline and in particular corporal punishment. It is not my intention in this ministry to give all of the answers rather it is to lay out the threads of the discussion.

Corporal punishment is the deliberate infliction of pain as retribution for an offence or for the purpose of disciplining or reforming a wrongdoer or to deter attitudes or behaviour deemed unacceptable. The term usually refers to methodically striking the offender with an implement whether in judicial, domestic or educational settings.

My question is “Does corporal punishment have a place in the Christian family and the Church of Christ?” Opinions are divided. The older testament suggests that it has a place.

- *Pro 10:13 In the lips of him that hath understanding wisdom is found: but a rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding.*
- *Pro 13:24 He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.*
- *Pro 22:15 Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.*
- *Pro 23:13 Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die.*
- *Pro 23:14 Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell.*
- *Pro 26:3 A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back.*
- *Pro 29:15 The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.*

Thus is Solomon's wisdom on child rearing. We might though ask what sort of children it produced! It certainly did not appear to achieve its aims but there may have been mitigating circumstance like for example. *1Ki 11:2 Of the nations concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. 1Ki 11:2 And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart.* Solomon was generally a poor parent.

I am not suggesting that these texts are proofs for the continuation of corporal punishment. We shall have to examine the wider context of scripture to make that certain. I would say by the same token there is a similar need to examine the validity of "stoning" within the framework of the Biblical society or church. *Deu 21:20 And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. Deu 21:21 And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put that evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear.*

The same is true of blood sacrifice and offerings that no longer have a place in our rituals. It is not for nothing that Jehovah of the Old Testament was viewed as a God of Anger and "smiting". We might also say that there are many similarities between Islamic law and the Jewish law. No wonder we feel more comfortable in the presence of Jesus. He is far more gentle and considerate.

The results of this is that many Christians ignore the older testament. It is too harsh, too demanding. We even separate the two books of the covenant. You will seldom though (unless you are Jew) find an Old Testament on its own. You will however find the New Testament without the Old! The Old Testament is in my opinion less studied than the new. I hope that through this study we will see the validity of the Old Testament as it comments on human nature and also the limitations of that Older Testament.

Our Lord uses the imagery of corporal punishment in the last judgement. *Luk 12:47 And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.* I don't think that this imagery is necessarily the reality. It conveys the idea of the severity of punishment in an analogy that people would understand. For example when William Grenfell the medical missionary explained hell to the Eskimo they were delighted. Hell was nice and warm just what they needed. Grenfell had to re-explain it as a place of eternal cold.

In the days of the Old Testament there were very harsh punishments that we now think of as barbarous.

Stoning. *Deu 17:5 Then shalt thou bring forth that man or that woman, which have committed that wicked thing, unto thy gates, even that man or that woman, and shalt stone them with stones, till they die.*

Burning. *Lev 20:14 And if a man take a wife and her mother, it is wickedness: they shall be burnt with fire, both he and they; that there be no wickedness among you.*

Hanging. *Deu 21:22 And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree:*

These punishments were part of the Lex talionis. *Lev 24:19 And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbour; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him; Lev 24:19 Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again.* Punishment and retaliation were ingrained in the Old Testament society.

Today the world is moving away from this sort of punishment. We now look at humane forms of killing. A woman was put to death in Virginia, USA. Teresa Lewis, 41 died by injection at 9.13pm local time 23rd September. She became the first woman executed in Virginia in nearly a century. Lewis appeared fearful, her jaw clenched as she was escorted into the death chamber at Grenville Correctional Center. She glanced tensely around at 14 prison officials, before being bound to a gurney with heavy leather straps. Moments before she died Lewis asked if her husband's daughter was near. She had been convicted of enticing two men to kill her husband Julian Clifton. Kathy Clifton, Julian's daughter and Lewis' stepdaughter, was in an adjacent witness room blocked from Lewis's view by a two-way mirror. 'I want Kathy to know that I love her and I'm very sorry,' Lewis said. Then as the drugs flowed into her body, her feet bobbed but she otherwise remained motionless. A guard lightly tapped her on the shoulder reassuringly as she slipped into death.

There is something very chilling and calculated about modern execution. It is as if punishment is more about the rights of the criminal than the victim.

The arguments arising against corporal punishment are many. Firstly it is suggested that corporal punishment on its own does not teach children right from wrong. Secondly although it makes children afraid to disobey when parents are present and when parents are not present to administer the punishment those same children will misbehave.

There are many arguments against spanking. Spanking a child will stop the child from misbehaving for the moment but studies have shown that the child's compliance will only last for a short time. Corporal punishment actually increases the child's non-compliant behaviour in the future. Psychologist H. Stephen Glenn said "Corporal punishment is the least effective method [of discipline]. Punishment reinforces a failure identity. It reinforces rebellion, resistance, revenge and resentment. And what people who spank children will learn is that it teaches more about you than it does about them that the whole goal is to crush the child. It's not dignified and it's not respectful."

It may trigger criminal, anti-social, violent, aggressive behaviour later in life. A longitudinal study of 442 boys born in 1972 found that one out of every three boys - those who have a specific version of a gene - who were maltreated during childhood will be almost certain to exhibit anti-social or criminal behaviour as an adult. Maltreatment was defined as including physical abuse. If this is true for boys subjected to physical abuse one wonders if the violence associated with conventional levels of corporal punishment could also trigger violent or aggressive behaviour later in life? Unfortunately, the study is recent and researchers do not yet know what level of violence is needed to trigger the negative adult behaviour. It can be argued that in the absence of precise data parents should err on the side of caution and avoid spanking at all costs.

Article "Spanking lowers a child's IQ" (sic!): A study at the University of New Hampshire released in 1998-July, found that spanking children apparently slows down their intellectual development. A study of 960 children found an average 4 point reduction in IQ among students, from an average IQ of 102 (above average) for children who are not spanked, to an average IQ 98 (below average) for who are. A reduction of 4 points is enough to have a significant negative functional effect on the students. We might ask whether it is the spanking or the fact that in a poor intellectual environment, spanking is more likely?

There are however a variety of situational factors such as the parent/child relationship that can moderate the effects of corporal punishment. Furthermore studying the true effects of corporal punishment requires drawing a boundary line between punishment and abuse. This is a difficult thing to do especially when relying on parents self-reports of their discipline tactics and interpretations of normative punishment.

Although the various methods of corporal punishment were steadily outlawed throughout the 20th Century it was not until after the 1967 Plowden report 'Children and their Primary Schools', that the abolition of corporal punishment in state schools was treated as a major issue and in 1986 it was outlawed altogether. It was not until 1998 that corporal punishment was outlawed for the few remaining independent schools that retained the practice.

The issue of corporal punishment must now be considered in light of the Human Rights Act 1998 and the European Convention of Human Rights, particularly Article Three on protection against torture, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Corporal punishment remains legal when used by parents. Since 1860, parents have been permitted to use 'reasonable chastisement' on their children and this remains the case today, except in Scotland which has legislated to ban parental corporal punishment. In the UK legislation prohibiting corporal punishment does not apply to the home or to some alternative care settings.

Clearly the humanist view is that corporal punishment violates human rights. But it is that same humanist society that wages war on sovereign nations, trades unfairly in poverty stricken countries, supports abortion (murdering 200,000 babies in the UK each year) and believes that it is socially acceptable to support the terminally lazy who will not work.

What should a Christian do? Well I will close this section with some thoughts. We should not blindly follow any teaching without understanding the context and implications. *Rom 14:23 And he that*

doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin. We have to have faith in what we hold. Just doing things because others do them or following teachings blindly is wrong.

Beating and killing may have a place in the church or they may not have a place but we have to determine the context before we decide. While the world may hold us accountable for its human rights violations, the Christian is ultimately accountable to God. Our first priority is to uphold the laws of the Kingdom of God. If we have a duty to discipline and punish we cannot disobey that and put human law above it.

Act 4:19 But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

The Laws of Discipline

Heb 12:4 Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. Heb 12:5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: Heb 12:6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

There is a principle embodied in the law relating to discipline. It is the principle of balance enshrined in nature. It is in nature known as Newton's 3rd law of motion "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction". Let me illustrate. *Lev 6:2 If a soul sin, and commit a trespass against the LORD, and lie unto his neighbour in that which was delivered him to keep, or in fellowship, or in a thing taken away by violence, or hath deceived his neighbour; Lev 6:3 Or have found that which was lost, and lieth concerning it, and sweareth falsely; in any of all these that a man doeth, sinning therein: Lev 6:4 Then it shall be, because he hath sinned, and is guilty, that he shall restore that which he took violently away, or the thing which he hath deceitfully gotten, or that which was delivered him to keep, or the lost thing which he found,* Therefore. *Exo 22:1 If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep.*

The law of God redresses the balance between the victim and the offender. Additionally the law takes into account the damages caused by the losses. *Exo 22:9 For all manner of trespass, whether it be for ox, for ass, for sheep, for raiment, or for any manner of lost thing, which another challengeth to be his, the cause of both parties shall come before the judges; and whom the judges shall condemn, he shall pay double unto his neighbour.* It has a top limit and takes into account damages and loss of use of property. There is also a deterrent effect as the balance of the redress favours the victim.

Notice that in Israel there were no long-term prisons. The Justice delivered ranged from restoration of goods to restoration of life. *Lev 24:20 Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again.* In other words you either restored the damage or gave up life. We need to see how this principle of "restoring" relates to corporal punishment? Does corporal punishment restore anything?

Jesus brings clarity to the law. *Mat 5:38 Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: Mat 5:39 But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.* This is not undermining the law or changing the law. It is adding a dimension to the law. It is showing that “an eye for an eye” was not a commandment. It was not something that you had to do. You could choose not to retaliate.

We now learn two important things about the law of Moses. Firstly there was a different law at creation that overrides Moses law. Secondly provisions in the law of Moses took into account the sinfulness of men’s hearts. *Mar 10:4 And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away. And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept.* Men are weak through sin. *Heb 7:28 For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; God graciously accounted for this in the law.*

There were trivial grounds for divorce. *Deu 24:1 When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house.* Because the hard heart is unforgiving divorce was accommodated to avoid the greater social problems if it were not. Men were and still are morally corrupt and selfish. The inclusion of these types of law was a damage limitation exercise.

Some aspects of law were therefore it seems biased towards the perpetrator of the wrong. Does corporal punishment fall into this class? People corporally punish others because it makes them feel better rather than correcting the offender? Is it about victimisation? Have I satisfied my own sense of hurt without addressing the issues at hand?

I haven’t looked at how to help the wife or the child. I have just got shot of the problem. I have taken the simplest route that made me feel better. That I think is an element of the laws of Moses. We have to be very careful that we do not find ourselves in that position. Jesus says in effect remove yourself from your own sense of hurt. You will never be objective if you do not!

New Testament Discipline

Heb 12:4 Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. Heb 12:5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: Heb 12:6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

Now we draw the threads of our discussion on corporal punishment together as we view discipline from a New Testament position. One thing that we should note is that in the Old Testament the church and the State were one and the same. In the New Testament the church and the State are not one. The church often fell foul of state laws for example not accepting the Roman emperor as god, hence they could not serve in the military.

We live within two circles that overlap yet they have separate philosophies. We are duty bound to

the State provision for law and we are duty bound to uphold the law of Christ *Rom 13:2 Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.* *Act 4:19 But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.* It is often a Catch-22 situation. Those setting up the laws of the New England colony found that Utopia was indeed difficult to set up.

The church also polices itself. *1Co 6:1 Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?* It does not use the world's lawyers to settle issues between brothers. I recall vaguely that some years ago, the publisher Hodder&Stoughton rebuked a Christian who took them to law without first discussing the issues as Christians.

Within the sphere of church self-discipline we note the following. There are no acts of violence against the person. There are no beatings, hangings, burnings or death penalties. The church is not the technician of births, deaths and marriages. It is not an arbiter for divorce for which it has no place. The ultimate sanction is excommunication. *2Th 3:14 And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.* If any chastening is needed it is done through the church delivering the individual into the hands of the devil. *1Co 5:5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

I recall many years ago after some of the children in the Woodenhill Fellowship made a profession of faith, that I questioned why the parents continued to use corporal punishment. There is no provision for beating adults much less those forgiven by Christ. It was losing sight of Biblical discipline with purpose. We had no doubt fallen into the pit our fathers had dug, for they disciplined us after their own pleasure - Greek, "according to what seemed fit to themselves." Their rule of chastening is what may seem fit to their own often erring judgment, temper or caprice. As the scholar Bengel observed "the absence in parents of the unerring wisdom of our heavenly Father. They err much at one time in severity, at another in indulgence and do not so much chasten as think they chasten."

So what should you do? Well, if you do not discipline within Christ eventually the State will discipline without Christ. Parental discipline for Christians is about upholding the values of Christ within a family. Those values are truth, moral uprightness and honest labour.

What do you do if little Johnny tells lies? Is it any different to you as an adult who tells lies? Perhaps you should find out why he lies and why he hides the truth? Is it a chastening issue or a teaching issue? What if little Johnny does not do his household chores? *2Th 3:10 For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.* There is a lesson that in life you do not get something for nothing (unless you are a socialist or communist). That's God's rule.

Hitting a person does not teach the value of labour. Not having anything at the end of the day to eat because you did not work, does. The Old Testament beating of a child was in my opinion a residue of the hard and unthinking heart. It satisfied more the parent than the child who as we observed "do not so much chasten as THINK they chasten".

Facing the Scourge

Heb 12:6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

We now face the scourge? There are two issues dealt with here, chastening (παιδεύω = I instruct) and scourging (μαστυόω = I scourge). One deals with the inner being and the other with the outer being. It is a theme we touched upon earlier. *Heb 12:1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,* There are the inner sins and the outer worldly weights.

Why we ask isn't chastisement enough? While it is our duty to instruct it is never given to us to scourge. It doesn't say that our fathers scourged us for our benefit but it does say that God does this. I think that it is because instruction doesn't automatically lead to obedience. We assume that because our sin is forgiven in Christ that we are now perfect before God. Life will be an easy ride to glory. Not so. We are far from perfection. *Rom 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.*

There are three main cases for suffering:

- 1) To create empathy/sympathy.
- 2) To demonstrate the power of God.
- 3) To deal with our fleshly nature.

All are for the purpose of refining and developing us. It is not dissimilar to polishing a gemstone. *Mal 3:17 And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.*

Knowing does not always lead to doing. There is a need to experience through suffering to make it part of our being. *Heb 5:8 Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;* We learn through suffering or at least it is intended that we do. We may learn sympathy and empathy. "I used to complain that I had no shoes until I met a man that had no feet".

We are also living in a sinful world, this of itself will lead to suffering. It will lead to genetic entropy, spiritual battles in heavenly and earthly places all taking their toll on us. It is part of life's risks and believers are not exempt. God's power is demonstrated in a universe at war with sin. Job is a prime example of this suffering. *Job 6:4 For the arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit: the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me. Job 23:10 But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.*

The story of Job deals in a large part with the words of his comforters. About 30 chapters deal with the worldly attempt to understand what was happening to Job. There was no worldly explanation. It is only when God intervenes that we understand what has happened. The key lesson from this is never seek understanding of your circumstances from men but go straight to the Lord.

The third suffering is that which removes our fleshly nature. Like a scourge it strips us of our carnality. *Pro 23:2 And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite. Mat 18:8 Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.* When we do not deal with our sinful nature God will. It is the destruction of the flesh. *1Co 5:5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. 1Co 11:30 For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.*

God suffers us sometimes to be scourged by men and to be buffeted by Satan and sometimes He scourges them Himself with the rod of men and with the stripes of the children of men but always in love. *Rom 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*

I came across a lovely verse recently which to me summed up this whole theme in a little book "Glimpses of the Glory about to be revealed". It was "The Father of all, so Jesus said, sits by the dying sparrows' bed."

God alone sees and He will judge righteous judgement.

Enduring Chastening

Heb 12:7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

God deals with us as sons. This is our inalienable right and part of the constitution of the Kingdom of Heaven. If I were to tell you that I had found out that you were connected to some royal dynasty your ears would probably prick up. It might even give you a greater sense of worth and value. So why is it that being a child of God, a son of God stirs up so little emotion in us? I think that it is one of the symptoms of cheap grace. We do not value sufficiently or see properly the value of God's saving grace in the death of Christ.

We are told by God that we can have a right or authority to become a son of His. This is a Divine right not a human right. Human rights are "rights and freedoms to which all humans are supposedly entitled." Proponents of the concept usually assert that everyone is endowed with certain entitlements merely by reason of being human, the basic rights and freedoms that all humans should be guaranteed, such as the right to life and liberty, freedom of thought and expression and equality before the law.

I cannot see that there is anything absolute in human rights. They are humanist rights. They spring from the evolutionary slime pits of convenience but there is nothing absolute in them. They are situation or convenience ethics and can change overnight. Those who reject a sovereign creator in favour of an evolutionary process have to find how absolute morality can have a place? Survival and

the fittest make the rules in nature. We make no moral judgement when a lion kills a zebra so why is it a moral issue when a man kills a man?

Man creates his own rights to organise and stabilise his own universe. They are not absolute rights but God's are. And as with all God's rights they are conditional. Rights are conditional.

Joh 1:12 but as many as received him, to them gave he the right to be children of God, to those that believe on his name; Darby Rev 22:14 Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

These are probably the only two inalienable rights in the Universe based upon God's words. Firstly the right to a relationship with God the Father, the Creator of life and secondly the right to life in Him. If you have not attained to these two conditional rights then you are eternally lost. If you do not accept and fulfil your part of the contract you are eternally lost. Whatever you did in your life will be meaningless and worthless in the absolute scheme of things if you fail to attain these. That is why we endure.

Enduring chastening, "sticking in there", we might say today. There are some remarkable examples of human endurance. These are often motivated by love and concern for others. *1Jn 3:16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.* It is amazing what can be endured by us mortals. One of my favourite examples is that of Sir Ernest Henry Shackleton.

In December 1914 Shackleton attempting the first Trans-Antarctic crossing, lost his ship, Endurance early in the expedition, isolating them on the ice. They drifted for 497 days before they reached solid land. Launching from the shore of Elephant Island on 24th April 1916 Shackleton decided to risk an open-boat journey to the distant South Georgia whaling stations (over 800 miles away) where he knew help was available. The strongest of the lifeboats christened 'James Caird' after the expedition's chief sponsor was chosen for the trip. Ship's carpenter Harry McNish made various improvements including raising the sides, strengthening the keel, building a makeshift deck of wood and canvas and sealing the work with oil paint and seal blood.

Shackleton refused to pack supplies for more than four weeks knowing that if they did not reach South Georgia within that time, the boat and its crew would be lost. For the next fifteen days he sailed through the waters of the southern ocean at the mercy of the stormy seas in constant peril of capsizing. Shackleton landed on South Georgia and crossed an icy mountain in 36 hours to launch the rescue of his men. He sailed on the ship Endurance and ended up an example of the word itself, "Endurance". He did it because he had a clear view of the outcome.

The Peaceable Fruit of Righteousness

Heb 12:8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Heb 12:11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

With all of the suffering in the world today we might think that all men were sons of God. Yet it is not the suffering but the outcome that is the important issue. What is the result of the chastening? For many people it would be resentment and anger. It would be looking for the time to get even. For the child of God it is “the peaceable fruit of righteousness”.

We often use the expression that something has borne fruit. Something that we started or planted has grown and has come back with more than we started with. God plants us and we grow into trees. *Isa 61:3 To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.*

These trees bear fruit to the planter God. *Joh 15:2 Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away (Gk: Lifts up): and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.* The man that God chastens or instructs for that persons eternal benefit is a fruitful person. *Eph 5:9 (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth); Eph 5:10 Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. Jas 3:18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.*

In our selfish lives that we live to ourselves we often lose sight of the fact that we are creatures made for the service of God and not for self. In this story Jesus tells us about a servant who has been working all day and then has to come in and serve his master. *Luk 17:7 But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? Luk 17:8 And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Luk 17:9 Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. Luk 17:10 So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.*

You may have your ideas about where you want to go, what you want to be and what you want to do in life but these may be far from God’s purpose for you. You may be more conscious of chastening in life because you are fighting against God’s way for you rather than flowing with it.

We would all have a lot of empathy with Jeremiah when God set a great task before him. *Jer 1:6 Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child..... Jer 1:8 Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD.* Yet in all of God’s tasks there is the accompanying grace and power to achieve. Is it not written? *Php 4:13 I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.* Not just some things!

As a boy the preacher William Edwin Sangster, one of the great preachers of the 20th Century went on a Sunday school camp and ran out of money during the first week. He wrote to his father “SOS. Out of money. RSVP”. No answer came neither during the second week. His companions thought that his father had forgotten him but philosophically he said “I don’t know what has happened but I’ll wait until I get home and he will tell me himself”. When he did get home his father told him that it was hard not to respond but he saw this as a great opportunity to teach William a lesson about the

value of money. Sangster recalled "I have known the value of money ever since". The lesson was brought home but notice the father's suffering also. We might call this "Tough love".

God's teaching methods are often similar. There appears to be no response to our pleas. We feel let down and chastened. Surely God should treat me better? Yet it is all part of the purpose of God for us. God is always with us but not always speaking to us directly. *Zep 3:17 The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.* The words "he will rest" (Hebrew חָרֵשׁ chârash like our word "scratch") has a meaning of being 'deaf' or 'silent'. In other words "He will be silent in His love". God's deafness does not mean God's indifference. It may be that we should reflect at these times that God really is dealing with us and that He is singing to us a song that we cannot hear at the time but will in due course.

Yes God too sings to His people and will teach them new songs. *Psa 40:3 And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.*

Suffering

Heb 12:8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

Richard Dawkins said "I am against religion because it teaches us to be satisfied with not understanding the world". Dawkins is clearly not a theologian. Religion does **not** teach "us to be satisfied with not understanding the world". It explains it all too well from creation to eternity the nature of this world its inhabitants and the world to come. As one of the founders of the Royal Society, Robert Boyle stated "The job of the natural philosopher (scientist) was not to ask what God must have done but (as far as possible) to enquire into what God actually did". Boyle argued that God's absolute freedom as a designer and creator requires of us an empirical and observational and not deductive approach to the natural order. *Look - (Observe) - to find out.*

What Dawkins is doing is saying that science is knowledge and religion is ignorance. Boyle says that God is and God does as He pleases and we observe the outcomes. This ignorance however is found among those who call themselves wise. *1Co 1:20 Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?* The godless mind is doomed. *Rom 1:28 Since these people refused even to think about God, he let their useless minds rule over them. That's why they do all sorts of indecent things. CEV.*

Rabbi Kushner wrote a book entitled 'When Bad Things Happen to Good People.' As Kushner watched his son degenerate with the disease progeria which prematurely turns children into old people, he concluded that God was good and hated to see us suffer but He simply wasn't powerful enough to handle all the problems of the world. Rabbi Kushner's God, was a God who hadn't arrived at being what he really wanted to be, he'd like to be a fully good God and a fully sovereign God and have absolute control over everything but he wasn't quite there yet. He was in the process. To Kushner God was all goodness but not all powerful. This is utter rubbish. As someone commented, "if that's who God is, I think He ought to resign".

This teaching has started to poison the church in its attempt to explain suffering. There are a multitude of reasons for suffering but God does not always reveal them to us personally. The philosophers gathered around Job had not a clue about why Job suffered. They had some reasons why people suffer but they couldn't say for sure why Job suffered. Then God introduces Himself. *Job 38:2 Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?*

Kushner would have preferred that God said, "Sorry you guys, I am really a good person but I am having a lot of trouble controlling the world." No! God displays His power as a peacock without shame or apology. That is who I am!

A god who cannot control creation is not the God of creation. He is a victim of creation. That god has created a monster like that of Dr Frankenstein, an uncontrollable beast that will destroy its creator, a universe running its own way, a mechanistic universe. Prophecy becomes uncertain guesses about an uncontrollable future. Salvation is no longer assured because the devil has a real chance of winning. This God is not the God of the Bible.

Taking Robert Boyle's view of God's natural works and applying it to suffering we would say that we can only *Look - (Observe) - to find out*. That means that often there are limits to our knowledge. Why did God make the planets like this and not that? We know not. The works of God don't come with labels attached giving reasons and explanations as you would see in a museum. The same is true with suffering. Why did that man lose his legs and that man have that disease? Suffering doesn't come with labels either.

There is nowhere in the passage in Hebrews where it explains individual suffering and why we suffer specific issues. It explains the end product but not the production line, the end product is: *Heb 12:11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness*

Those who cannot see the hand of God in their suffering are bastards (illegitimate).

Holiness 1

Heb 12:14 Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:

We have begun to explore the two natures in the child of God. This is the difference between the old man and the new man. *Col 3:9 Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; Col 3:10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:*

Our subject "holiness" is the result of putting on the new man. *Eph 4:24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.* The Christian is one who has an interest in the death of Christ and in the forgiveness of sin that comes from that. *Rom 6:6 Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.* The first thing that a Christian needs to acknowledge is that there is a new

direction to his life as a result of this. *Col 3:1 If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above.* If he claims to be part of Christ and part of Christ's resurrection he firstly needs a new mindset. *Eph 4:23 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind.*

Many people think that Christianity is just about church attendance, praying, Bible reading and some good works. They see it as a set of outward activities, which to some extent it is but it is far more than that. It is about personal transformation. It is about becoming so different that you are virtually unrecognisable from the person you were. *Rom 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed* 9Greek μεταμορφουσθε) *by the renewing of your mind.* Metamorphosed!

This is not about developing with age, learning more or maturing. It is about seeing creation with God's eyes, thinking God's thoughts, seeing God's plan and ministering God's values to a dying world. This can only come from a new mind that is not clogged up by all of the false knowledge imparted by a world at war with God. How do you start this renewal process? If you cannot tell, then how can it be happening?

The new man is also described as being Christ. *Rom 13:14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.* *Gal 3:27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.* This gives us the information that we are to become Christ-like in the way we develop in our lives. Becoming Christ-like is synonymous with becoming holy. The very identity of Christ is holiness itself. *Php 2:5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:*

At the turn of the year people are inclined to make "resolutions". They resolve to change something in their lives. Top of the list are weight loss, debt reduction, spending more time with the family, giving up smoking, learning a new skill and so on. These may be all well and good but God has given us a list which we should resolve to tackle. *Col 3:5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:* *Col 3:6 For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience:* *Col 3:7 In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.* *Col 3:8 But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.* *Col 3:9 Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds;* *Col 3:10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:*

Here then are our New Year resolutions written for us. I do not say that the resolutions will even change from year to year since we shall fight them for life. Yet they are the guide as to what we must do to be Holy. The ideas that we saw in the Wesley's Holy Club did not tackle these issues. People who think that Holiness is merely distancing us from the world and its people have missed the point. We cannot isolate ourselves from our nature by hiding in a convent or locking ourselves in our room. Our old man goes where we go and therefore we have to deal with him in all circumstances of life.

The Old man must be starved to death by keeping him on low diet. The food of the new nature is the Word of God. While we are directly feeding upon that we are indirectly starving the old nature. For (and this is the important fact) we cannot be feeding both natures at the same time! The

nourishment on which the one nature thrives will starve the other. And this fact cuts both ways. If we are feeding the old nature on man's books and man's teachings we shall be keeping the new nature ill-fed, impoverished and weak. The old nature will thrive on general literature. But the new nature will thrive only on the Word of God. His words "are spirit, and they are life" and only what is spiritual can be assimilated by spirit. *Joh 6:63 It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.*

Holiness 2

Heb 12:14 Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:

Our old man goes where we go and therefore we have to deal with him in all circumstances of life. We cannot neglect him and we have responsibilities towards him. The first responsibility is to accept what God says about it. *Rom 6:11 Likewise reckon (Greek λογιζεσθε) ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Do you compute this? Christians are "work in progress".

If we reckon this is true then it will remove any objections that we cannot change. I have come across many so called "Christians" who say I cannot change, it is too hard. This puts a big question mark over whether they have reckoned what Christ has done. If we are dead to sin and as a result we are alive to God then we can change and we must change.

It does not say we are to feel ourselves as dead or that we are to realize it but to "reckon" it as being really so in God's sight, as though it were an accomplished fact. This is not a matter of feeling but of faith. If we are guided by our feelings we shall never enjoy it. It is for us to "believe God".

We further have a responsibility which is to: *Rom 13:14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.* Why? Because "the flesh profiteth nothing". *Joh 6:63 It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.* "Making no provision" does not mean that we are to stop looking after ourselves and become ill kempt tramps or that we cease to feed ourselves and wilfully decay. If we examine the word "provision" in the context of the verse it is the provision for our desires or lusts.

We saw that the Old man must be starved to death by keeping him on low diet. We cannot be feeding both natures at the same time! The nourishment on which the one nature thrives will starve the other. Like Martha we can be overwhelmed by the world's demands. *Luk 10:40 But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me.* *Luk 10:41 And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things:* *Luk 10:42 But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.*

It is a question as to where our priorities lie. If this life is an end in itself then our priorities will lie here. If we are passing through this life on a journey elsewhere it will not be a priority. The priority lies ahead and that is where we concern ourselves. That is why Jesus encourages us to get our priorities in the right order. *Mat 6:25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye*

shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Mat 6:26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Mat 6:27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? Mat 6:28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: Mat 6:29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Mat 6:30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Mat 6:31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? Mat 6:32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. Mat 6:33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Mat 6:34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

Then we must regard ourselves as dead as far as this world is concerned. *Col 3:5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth;* If we have died with Christ what do we have to mortify? The word "mortify" is **νεκρόω**, to make dead hence, to treat as having become dead. Of Abraham it is written: *Romans 4:19, Being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now as good as dead (he being about a hundred years old); or the deadening (**νέκρωσις**) of Sarah's womb.* And *Hebrews 11:12, wherefore also there sprang of one and that too of [one] as good as dead.*

We see from the two passages quoted that it is used of one who was actually alive but "as good as dead", i.e. impotent as to producing life and as to all practical purposes dead. Moreover the word is used in Colossians. *Col 3:5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:* Also not of the old nature itself but of its "members" *Mat 5:29 And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.* Seeing that you died with Christ occupy yourselves with heavenly things and not earthly things, set your mind on Christ and on the blessed fact that ye are "complete in Him" and that when He appears in glory ye also shall be manifested in glory. Remember how Paul lived his life.

Gal 2:20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

Holiness 3

Heb 12:14 Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:

As we consider the changes resulting from a relationship with Christ, I came across again, the idea of "low self esteem" as being one of the big problems in life. It supposedly holds us back from achieving what we could become and it has become a key focus of so called Christian psychology and a cure all for life's ills.

According to Nick Arrizza a former Psychiatrist and Medical Doctor, “Obesity can trigger feelings of low self esteem. Poor stamina and ungainly physical appearance often invite cruel comments from the world. But the converse is also true - feelings of low self esteem can prompt irrational eating behaviours that can worsen obesity.” This is a weird circular argument...fat people are unhappy, fat people eat too much because they are unhappy, unhappy people get fatter. You will notice that the problem is not eating too much, it is not feeling hungry but it is feelings of low self esteem.

From the late 1960s on self-esteem became a fashionable and influential idea. One of the first exponents was a young psychology professor called Stanley Coopersmith from California. Self-esteem may simply have remained a psychological and philosophical concept, debated by academics if it hadn't been taken up by politicians in California in the late 1980s. John Vasconcellos was a state assemblyman who believed that low self-esteem was the cause of crime, teenage pregnancy, drug abuse and school underachievement. He believed that boosting young people's self-esteem could be seen as a 'social vaccine'. Money spent on this, he argued, would dramatically reduce the problems plaguing modern society. John Vasconcellos even believed that improving self-esteem would help the state balance the budget since those with high self-esteem earned more money and so paid more in tax.

Studies began to suggest that those with low self-esteem are only likely to damage themselves whereas those with high self-esteem are more likely to indulge in behaviour which has negative effects on others. This led to the consequence that those with high self-esteem posed a greater threat to society than those with low self-esteem. It is now over ten years (at the time of writing) since research completely demolished the notion that self-esteem building is some kind of magic bullet and more than five years (from the time of writing) since research indicating it might be positively harmful. Self esteem however is still on the books as far as counselling is concerned. Both non-Christian and Christian organisations are running with self esteem.

According to iloveyouloveme.com (Love, Romance & Happiness Through Successful Relationships) “The key to healing guilt and low self-esteem is to understand what was happening in your original family and accept that you made mistaken choices about your self-worth and guilt. Above all you must find a way of forgiving yourself and the people around you for what happened all those years ago. To do this try to accept that your parents were doing their very best for you given their own circumstances. They loved you dearly but there may have been times when they struggled to express this adequately or when life's challenges made things difficult for them. As you forgive and rediscover your innocence you will learn to love yourself - your life will take great leaps forward. This will automatically end your sacrifice because your guilt is no longer driving your behaviour.”

Tracy Knight in Bournemouth says, “I offer Counselling based on the CWR (Crusade for World Revival) model of Christian Counselling” She says that the causes of low self-esteem include:

- "Early years are considered particularly important in establishing our self-esteem and our family is a strong force in the development of our individual self-esteem. High self-esteem in parents can be used to nurture children's self-esteem
- How an individual develops their self-esteem during their time at school can also be an important factor in their sense of worth. Those who develop high self-esteem during this time

are generally less likely to engage in destructive behaviour such as alcohol and drug abuse and crime.

- Our own natural personality and the messages and influences we receive from everyone around us about how we should act and feel can affect our self-esteem.
- High self esteem has to be sought by the individual themselves and can't be 'given' to a person. An individual must actively seek to improve their own self-esteem if they are to build their sense of worth."

She continues,

"Therapy or counselling can often help those suffering from low self-esteem and help develop a sense of self to ensure a more fulfilling life. Some individuals may benefit from dance, music, painting or creative writing to find a sense of empowerment within themselves. Support groups on assertiveness or building self-esteem are also widely available in the UK."

"Sometimes keeping a journal to explore past negative memories may help individuals relate to how these are causing them difficulties now. Taking care of your physical health, exercising, reducing stress levels and accepting a realistic challenge can also help towards building self-esteem."

Dance your self to esteem!

What started this ministry was this statement from "Every Day with Jesus".

"Jimmy Long has written much about problems of low self-worth encountered by Generation X, children of the post-World War II baby boom. Many grew up in dysfunctional families and Long argues that what they needed was 'the gospel of adoption out of shame into God's family'. Many of their problems have been passed down through the generations. To minister effectively today, The Christian community needs to help people to overcome their feelings of low self-worth with the message of hope in Jesus."

At the heart of this message is the "blame culture". Blame everything and everyone except yourself. This blame shifting is at the heart of low self esteem. I am a product of my environment and upbringing and look what they did to me. It's not me, the food made me fat.....the dog ate my homework! Now Jesus says that the problems in your life are your problems and there is no room to blame others. *Joh 8:24 for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.* It's your sins not the sins of others or your parents.

In the passage from Every Day with Jesus quoted above the words, "low self-worth", should be substituted with the word **SIN**. "People need to overcome their feelings of sin with the message of hope in Jesus".

What is happening here is that psychology is making a new suit of clothes for the new man that contains a lot of fabric of the old man. Your problems are not really about how bad your old man is, they are about the bad influences on the old man. If you just come to terms with the old man and get a bit more self esteem you can keep the old man. It may not make you less of a "fatty" but you will be a fatty with esteem. You don't have to get rid of your past you learn to live with it and embrace it. Take up painting or a sport, join a self help group and this will solve your problems.

Let us get back to the truth. Do not be deceived by these alternatives to the new man. Paul didn't say "put on an artist's smock, put on running shoes, learn the piano, and build self esteem". No, he said **put on Christ**.

While people are so engaged with self, self esteem, self worth, they are focused on their own innards. We are taught to look away from this because there is nothing good in there. *Rom 7:18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing:* The person who continues to try and salvage anything of the old man is like Lot's wife who couldn't take her eyes off of Sodom. Her heart was still there.

My value lies in not what I was or even in trying to salvage that. My value lies in Christ who died for me and who offers me a new and better life. Forget self. *Gal 2:20 I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*

Holiness 4

Heb 12:14 Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:

We now move on from the Old Nature to the New nature. There are a number of names associated with the New Nature.

Spirit:

Rom 8:9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his,..... Rom 8:16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:..... 1Co 2:12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God,..... Joh 3:6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

NOTE: The word "Spirit" is Subject to Various Usages in Scripture. Sometimes the Word Refers to:

The Character of Man

Man Possessing an Invisible Character or Spirit that is Known or Manifest through Action: *Rom 8:15 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father,..... 1Co 2:11 For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God,..... 1Co 4:21 What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?..... 2Co 7:1 Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from*

all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God..... Psa 78:8 And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not stedfast with God.Pro 14:29 He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly..... Pro 16:18 Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.Pro 25:28 He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.

The Members of the God-Head

The Father. Joh 4:23 *But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. Joh 4:24 God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*

The Lord Jesus Christ. 1Co 6:17 *But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.2Co 3:17 Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. 2Co 3:18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

The Holy Spirit. Joh 14:16 *And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Joh 14:17 Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.*

The Specific Sense in which it is used in the Pauline Epistles: It Describes a Spiritual Operation and relation by which God Communicates His own Life and Nature to Man; and this Gift is termed "Spirit" or the "New Nature". Rom 8:4 *That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Rom 8:5 For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. Rom 8:6 For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Rom 8:7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. Rom 8:8 So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. Rom 8:9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. Rom 8:10 And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. Rom 8:11 But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. Rom 8:12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. Rom 8:13 For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. Rom 8:14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. Rom 8:15 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. Rom 8:16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: Joh 3:6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

The Spiritual Man: (In Contrast to the Natural Man). Rom 8:5 *For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. Rom 8:6 For to*

be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. 1Co 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.; Gal 6:1 Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

The New Man: (In Contrast to the Old Man). Eph 4:24 *And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness..... Col 3:9 Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:*

The New Creature. 2Co 5:17 *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new..... Gal 6:15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.*

The Inward Man: (In Contrast to the Outward Man). 2Co 4:16 *For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day..... Eph 3:16 That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;*

The Spiritual Mind: (In Contrast to the Carnal Mind). Rom 8:4 *That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace,;..... Rom 7:23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.1Co 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.*

The evidence for the new nature is overwhelming. This is a higher, newer, spiritual nature than we are naturally born with.

Holiness 5

Heb 12:14 Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:

We now look to the new man. Eph 4:24 *And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Col 3:10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:* In essence the new man is Christ being formed in us. It is being possessed by Christ.

We see many illustrations in the New Testament of people being “possessed” with devils. The word “possessed” is really an interpolation. We should more properly say that the people are demonised. Mat 9:32 *As they went out, behold, they brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil.* This shows us that man can be controlled, disabled and destroyed by symbiotic entities. Symbiosis is a

close prolonged association between two or more different organisms of different species that may but does not necessarily, benefit each member.

This symbiosis is at work in humanity. *Eph 2:2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:* The devil is now at work in the unbeliever, their minds do not work independently of the devil.

Christ showed His power is greater than the devils and that He could remove their power. *Mat 9:33 And when the devil was cast out, the dumb spake: and the multitudes marvelled, saying, It was never so seen in Israel.*

People talk about letting Jesus into your heart or giving your heart to Jesus. Well I do not think that is a formula for being saved but it is something that we should look for in our Christian lives. *Eph 3:17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, Christ is not an external force or personality, He is internal. Joh 14:17 the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see him nor know him; but ye know him, for he abides with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you orphans, I am coming to you.*

Just as man can be possessed by evil, so can he be possessed by good. *Rom 8:9 But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.Rom 8:11 But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.* A spiritual person has the spirit of God in them.

Because of this a Christian can never be alone. Lonely is not in the Bible. Loneliness is a deceit of the devil. In the darkest moments of life the Christian is not by himself. *Psa 23:4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.* We may desert God but he does not desert us. We may forget God but He does not forget us. If we feel isolated or on our own we should take time to confirm the presence of God. *Mat 28:20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*

It is perhaps due to our attitude that we will often only seek the presence of God in extreme circumstances. When things go wrong and we are driven to despair and into the presence of God. Rather than seek His presence in extremity, should we not practice the presence of God in the mundane? Should we not seek to understand the presence of Christ in our lives in the ordinary rather than the extraordinary? I think that the positive approach to life comes from a positive approach to Christ. That is why Paul was a survivor.

2Co 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. 2Co 4:8 We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 2Co 4:9 Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; 2Co 4:10 Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

Holiness 6

Heb 12:14 Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:

A brother involved in Mission work in Uganda told me that “We run a vocational training project for vulnerable teenagers and the biggest thing we can bring/teach, is change from the inside out”.

There is a story in the Gospel of Luke (chapter 18) about a rich man who wanted to live forever. He had lived a pretty good life but was hung up upon his wealth. He just could not stop coveting it. He loved his money. So Jesus put him to the test and challenged him to “Give it away”. This just upset him because he couldn’t do it. Or was it that he wouldn’t do it because he did not want to change? This man had 9/10th’s of the law in his life but had real problems with 1/10th of it. He wanted the benefits of life without making any personal change or sacrifice to get it. That is so like many Christians.

Isaac Watts wrote: Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast, Save in the death of Christ my God! All the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to His blood. This is the question a new Christian must ask. Will I live an empty (vain) life or will I live a life fulfilled by Christ?

Pilgrim’s Progress describes the journey to the Celestial City and that to get there they had to pass through a town. The town had a Fair which ran all year and so the town was called Vanity Fair. *Ecc 11:8 But if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity.* The pilgrims when asked what they would buy at the fair said “Truth” and at that there was a commotion that led to the death of Faithful.

Vanity destroyed faithfulness. I have to say that I do not often see many great changes in many people who are converted. One reason may be that there is little emphasis in the church on change. I have never heard a sermon on the new man. It is almost an assumption that you will find out about that yourself. People continue with their old lives without consideration of the changes required for the new.

Col 3:5 Don't be controlled by your body. Kill every desire for the wrong kind of sex. Don't be immoral or indecent or have evil thoughts. Don't be greedy, which is the same as worshiping idols. Col 3:6 God is angry with people who disobey him by doing these things. Col 3:7 And that is exactly what you did, when you lived among people who behaved in this way.

Many would say, well I never did any of that anyway. But the list is not exhaustive. There is much else. I read an interesting comment this week. A Catholic priest in Dublin shocked his congregation when he preached on the prodigal son, because he told them, “There are some of you here who would be greatly upset if God announced He had done away with Hell. You would be upset because you have more interest in people’s judgement than in their forgiveness.”

There is a self-righteousness in the Churches that looks more to other people’s faults and shortcomings than it does to their own. It says something about our attitude to law (and our

theology) that we would be horrified if a Pastor committed adultery but we wouldn't think twice if he broke the speed limit. If the church secretary was embezzling the funds we would be appalled but not if he didn't wear his seat belt. And how about a congregation member getting "stoned", we would be shocked but we wouldn't blink an eyelid if they regularly used their mobile 'phones while driving.

We have double standards and those double standards undermine the law. Failure in one point we are told is equally failure in all points. *James 2:10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.*

When it comes to holiness and the new man we are often making our own rules as we go along. Learning to forgive makes us more aware of our own weaknesses. An understanding of personal sin is the first step to holiness. Hypocrites don't have that.

Holiness 7

Heb 12:14 Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:

We concluded last time that unless we have a sense of sinfulness we will not be aware of the need for holiness. *Rom 7:7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. Rom 7:8 But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead.*

The relationship with Christ heightens that sense of lawlessness in us. *1Co 9:21 And when I am with people who are not ruled by the Law I forget about the Law to win them. Of course, I never really forget about the law of God. In fact, I am ruled by the law of Christ.CEV*. The authorised version has "under the law". The Greek is literally "in lawed", ἔννομος.

The question then arises what are Christ's laws? Where are they written? How do I know what to do? They are enshrined in that perfect summary of the law. *Mat 22:37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.*

This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

The entire fabric of the Christian faith hangs upon this thread of our love to God and man. You can sing and pray and read and do devotions until your head pops but unless you are in to this "Royal law" (Basilikos) it is worth nothing. *Jas 2:8 If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: You see, pure religion never happens in church, it happens in life. Jas 1:27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*

There are those who say you do not have to go to church to be a Christian. I think they are quite right. The early church didn't have parish churches, cathedrals or chapels. They were people who

spread the gospel by being Jesus in the ordinary. By that I mean they brought Jesus with them in everyday life.

Putting on the new man is all about the individual desire to have more of Jesus in everyday life. If we focus on that royal law then we can divine what we should be doing in each circumstance of life. How simple is it? Just 2 laws to remember not 10. What would Jesus do?

If I am loving my neighbour as I do myself, I am putting on the new man. I am exhibiting those new man characteristics that come from the inside. I am actively engaged in thinking about how I can do good to my neighbour.

Now I shall make an aside to you younger Christians and show how you can apply this practically. Who is your neighbour? You may think that it is the old couple next door or the people over the road. Let me bring it closer to home. In your own house there are neighbours. Who are they? They are called parents, children, and family.

You are not told to love your parents I assume that is taken for granted. You are to honour them. *Eph 6:2 Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;)*. The word “honour” means to esteem or value them. The opposite of honouring is taking them for granted. Now I want you to ask yourself “How do I honour my parents?” Perhaps later you can have a discussion at home and share with them how you honour them. It’s a sort of “feedback” session. You can see then if their ideas of being honoured match yours.

The new man isn’t a suit of clothes that we buy as a complete suit. It is something that we make ourselves. It is like the armour of God. *Eph 6:11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.* Where does the armour come from? You make it. That sword and spear will be as sharp and strong as you make it.

Holiness 8

Heb 12:14 Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:

Holiness in the Older Testament consisted of two parts, outward holiness and inner holiness. Outward holiness related to rituals and associations such as touching an unclean animal. *Lev 10:10 And that ye may put difference between holy and unholly, and between unclean and clean;* What was the point of the outward laws of cleanliness? They were designed to teach man about his inward state.

Holiness is a difficult concept to explain. The fine lines between being right with God and being wrong with God are complex. Bringing the inward concepts into an outward context makes them easier to understand. That was the temporary purpose of the laws of cleanliness. *Act 10:28 And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.*

Outward cleansing illustrated the need for inner cleansing. *Heb 9:13 For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: Heb 9:14 How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?*

I think that it is unfortunate that the Older Testament is so neglected, that people have little understanding of the old laws. The result is I think that people have lost that sense of their own uncleanness. One particular ceremonial law related to Leprosy. Leprosy was often associated with pride, such as when Miriam contradicted Moses. *Num 12:5 And the LORD came down in the pillar of the cloud, and stood in the door of the Tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam: and they both came forth. Num 12:6 And he said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. Num 12:7 My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. Num 12:8 With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? Num 12:9 And the anger of the LORD was kindled against them; and he departed. Num 12:10 And the cloud departed from off the Tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was leprous.*

However it occurred once you were declared unclean your life was miserable. You were an outcast from society, forced to live outside of the city. You were further humiliated by having to announce yourself wherever you went. Unclean, Unclean, you had to cry. *Lev 13:45 If you ever have leprosy, you must tear your clothes, leave your hair uncombed, cover the lower part of your face, and go around shouting, "I'm unclean! I'm unclean!" CEV*

Can you imagine doing that? With a rag across your mouth shouting a warning to others, do not come near me, I am unclean, I am filthy, I will contaminate you. How sad and demeaning. No wonder the lepers cry to Jesus for mercy. *Luk 17:12 And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off: And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.*

As a Jew you would have taken every opportunity to have avoided that contamination as it would affect your relationship with the Lord. Uncleanness separated you from the church. This still applies and we should be in no uncertain mind about the consequences of being contaminated by the unclean.

Eph 5:11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. 2Co 6:14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? Jas 4:4 Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

Eph 5:5 For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be

not ye therefore partakers with them. 1Co 15:33 Don't fool yourselves. Bad friends will destroy you.
CEV

That is where I close on this subject. If you are interested in the new man in your life he is easily compromised or destroyed. Holiness is about choices in life. If you go against the advice God has given you, you will suffer now and in eternity. Without holiness you will never set eyes upon God. These rules are not restrictive, they are directive. They show what we should look for in life and what to avoid. God wants the best for you and I am convinced that if you ask for God's help He will give you the best.

Bitterness

Heb 12:15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; Heb 12:15 Make sure that no one misses out on God's wonderful kindness. Don't let anyone become bitter and cause trouble for the rest of you.
CEV

What do we understand by bitterness? Peter perceived bitterness in Simon the magician. *Act 8:23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.* It appears it was caused by Simon's desire for someone else's gift. I think that bitterness is the result of jealousy and this can lead to trouble in the church.

Pre-eminence and factions built around the cult of personality are the base of sectarianism. *3 Jn 1:9 I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. 1Co 3:4 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?*

You would think that Christianity would automatically adopt "the love your neighbour" attitude but that is far from the truth. For some it is harder to love your Christian brother than it is to love your unsaved brother. Paul had to lay some rules down because of this in the Corinthian church. They loved to show off their spiritual gifts. *1Co 14:26 How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.*

The whole purpose of gifts was lost on them. They even regarded gifts as making themselves separate from each other. *1Co 12:15 If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?* I remember well in the early '70's how people pushed "speaking in tongues. If you didn't manifest this you were somehow a second class less spiritual Christian. Yet it was the easiest gift to fake unlike for example preaching.

Christians like higher rather than lower positions. I also recall an occasion when a Christian woman we knew was offered the job of the lavatory cleaner in her chapel. She was most upset by this and even her unbelieving husband joined in her complaint. When it comes to serving the church Christians prefer to do it from the high table rather than the low table, the chief seats rather than the lower seats.

The point that is often missed in churches is that they should be about building people up, edifying. *1Co 14:12 Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church. Eph 4:11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:* Churches activities should focus on strengthening the body of Christ for its spiritual battles. It should exercise the soul. I don't think that we should always come away from meetings with a huge warm glow in our soul. There are times when we should ache, times when we should repent, times when we should be sad as well. Exercise sometimes hurts.

Churches can lose sight of their duty to members and often have more of an outward focus than an inward focus. Evangelism becomes more important than Fellowship. Yet what is going on within the church is more important because enemies are not external they are internal. *Jas 4:1 From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?*

The antichrists arise within churches *1Jn 2:18 Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. 1Jn 2:19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.*

It is not suggested that because of this the churches hold inquisitions and witch-hunt's. However it should not avoid the issues that will divide it and damage it. Just letting things pass will be destructive because it will allow dissent to breed.

Bitterness causes trouble and defiles.

What Is A Birthright?

Heb 12:16 Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.

The story of these fraternal twins is well known. Esau despised his birthright and Jacob was a crook who cheated to get his hands on it. Neither of them particularly savoury characters yet it is Esau who is condemned for the low value that he placed upon his birthright. What is a birthright? It is a special inheritance and consists of a number of parts.

The birthright consisted in a double portion of the father's inheritance *Deu 21:17 But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.*

With the patriarchs it also embraced the chieftainship, the rule over the brethren and the entire family. *Gen 27:29 Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren,*

and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee.

And the title to the blessing of the promise? *Gen 27:4 And make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die.* This included the future possession of Canaan and of covenant fellowship with Jehovah. *Gen 28:4 And give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham.*

The birthright or inheritance was valuable, especially the gift of the “Promised Land”, this has a counterpart in the New Testament. The Promised Land was a type of Heaven. *Heb 12:22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels.* This is our inheritance and this was understood when the gospels were written. *Luk 18:18 And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? Rev 21:7 He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.*

The writer of Hebrews is directing us to consider our inheritance and through the illustration of Esau he asks of us “What value do you put upon it?” Is it a pearl of great price? *Mat 13:45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.* Is it a field containing treasure? *Mat 13:44 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.*

Is this of real value that we would make any sacrifice to lay hold on it or is it worth no more than a hamburger or a sausage roll? Is this birthright or inheritance something that occupies the prime place in our lives? I can to some extent see Jacob’s preoccupation with the birthright and how he would go to any means to obtain it but see how worthless it was to Esau.

If we despise the inheritance we do much more. We despise the maker of the inheritance and we despise the means whereby we obtain it. It is not just a matter of neglect it is open rejection of the covenant of Christ.

Heb 10:29 Of how much sorcer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

On Easter Sunday we can see in the attitudes of our nation towards Christianity in that it places little value upon it. Even within the churches, the hunger and thirst to know more of the things of God is becoming satisfied in worldly trivia. The similarity with the fall of Ancient Rome and the persecution of Christians is here, in this generation, fed on bread and circuses.

Our Relationship with Christ

Heb 12:17 For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

There is a lesson here that there are no second chances. *Heb 6:4 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, Heb 6:5 And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, Heb 6:6 If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.*

The relationship with Christ and God is a marriage. If we defile the marriage there is no coming back. *Deu 24:4 Her former husband, which sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife.* Salvation is about endurance. *Mat 10:22 And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.* Like any marriage it requires working at.

My first observation is that there is a difference between rejecting Christ and sinning against Christ. Sin is bound up in our nature and we are liars if we say it is not. *1Jn 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* The fact that I have sin in my life is not the grounds for Christ rejecting me. To the contrary it is the basis of my having a relationship with Christ. *1Ti 1:15 This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.* We might all vie for that position - the chief of sinners.

Our relationship with Christ is founded upon our confession of guilt. *1Jn 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* It is as if I go to the physician with a disease and he says that it is chronic, that is it will be with you for life but I can help you to get by with it. I can choose to go with the physician or reject his help. If I reject his help by this analogy I cannot go back. Salvation is about keeping the relationship with the physician. *Luk 5:31 And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick.*

My second observation is that we must be aware that we are "sick". We have a need for continual forgiveness. We cannot have an on/off relationship with Christ. However much we fail, however bad we are that is no reason to stop the relationship. People who say "I am not good enough" to be a Christian have missed the point. The question is "Are you bad enough to be a Christian?" I am always concerned for those who lack a sense of their sinfulness.

Esau did not come to a single point where he rejected the birthright. His whole attitude was one of rejection from the start. We can make mistakes, we can sin but we can immediately do something about it. Take David for example, when he disobeyed and numbered God's people. *2Sa 24:10 And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly.* He knew immediately that he had done wrong. His conscience hit back at him for the wrong he had done.

Esau had no conscience. He made no steps to correct his initial mistake when he sold his birthright for a meal. It never troubled him throughout his life until the day came when he expected it to be handed over. Then he realised it was lost forever. There are many who treat their Christianity in the same way. It is nothing personal to them that gets them fired up. It is not a key part of their daily lives. If somebody else does not drive them to consider it they will not bother with it.

There are many people like Esau whose faith belongs to other people. What do I mean by this? I mean that they live in the shadow of someone else's belief. They do not seek truth for themselves, they do not pray by themselves, they do not confess their own sin and they do not build their own personal relationship with Christ. They are in sum indifferent to the consequences of their life.

Esau did not care until it was too late. By the time that he woke up to what he had done there was no going back. I believe that the weeping on the day of judgement will be the weeping of Esau and his descendants. Luk 13:28 *There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

They are weeping for the opportunity of a lifetime that they let slip.

Our Mediator

Heb 12:18 For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest,

God progressively revealed Himself to the nation of Israel. Firstly Moses becomes God's deliverer confronting the king of Egypt. Exo 5:2 *And Pharaoh said, Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go and they said, The God of the Hebrews hath met with us: let us go, we pray thee, three days' journey into the desert, and sacrifice unto the LORD our God; lest he fall upon us with pestilence, or with the sword.*

Through Moses the nation was delivered from Egypt where plagues, signs and wonders culminated in the crossing of the red sea and the destruction of Pharaohs army. God led the people as a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night. In all of this the nation had not heard the voice of God but this was soon to change.

It was from the description an awful sight. Exo 19:12 *And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death:* Exo 19:13 *There shall not an hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live:* when the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount. Exo 19:14 *And Moses went down from the mount unto the people, and sanctified the people; and they washed their clothes.* Exo 19:15 *And he said unto the people, Be ready against the third day: come not at your wives.* Exo 19:16 *And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled.* Exo 19:17 *And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount.* Exo 19:18 *And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended*

as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. Exo 19:19 And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice. Exo 24:17 And the sight of the glory of the LORD was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel. Deu 4:11 And ye came near and stood under the mountain; and the mountain burned with fire unto the midst of heaven, with darkness, clouds, and thick darkness. And the LORD spake unto you out of the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice.

The people were taken to Mount Sinai where the covenant was made and the 10 commandments forged as the basis of the relationship with God. You would think that such a sight would have made a profound impression on their lives that they should obey without question this powerful God. Not so however. The Israelites were left to themselves and thinking Moses had vanished began to make their own god. *Exo 32:1 And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us;*

Here is one of the great sins of the church. It redefines God in the face of His revealed Word. Left to ourselves we will try and make God into our own image. Knowing and believing the real Jesus is critical because Jesus said. *Joh 8:24 I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.*

The Jehovah's Witnesses hold that Jesus is not God but a god. Catholics do not believe that Christ alone can save but needs the help of Mary. They invented purgatory as a monument to the inability of Christ to save. There are many errors about the person of Christ.

The way of life is through a very narrow gate. It is well marked and well documented. God has given us His truth not to debate it but to do it. When we turn against that truth He turns against us. *Rom 1:21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.*

There are many in the church that think that the Old Testament was cruel and that Jesus has given us a softer path to walk in the New Testament. That somehow He is more forgiving, less rigid and more tolerant than the God of Moses. We might think as we look at our verse today that since we have not come to a mountain, "that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest", that we have also come into a much easier life. Not so. God has not changed. *Heb 12:29 For our God is a consuming fire.*

What has changed is the mediator of the covenant. The man Moses stood between the people of God in past times now the mediator is Jesus. God has not changed but Christ has softened His anger towards us but God Himself still hates sin as much as He ever did. We may not be at the foot of Mount Sinai but we stand under the same obligations of obedience to God.

Heb 12:25 See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven:

Zionism

Heb 12:22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,

You have probably heard of the word Zionism. After almost two millennia of existence of the Jewish Diaspora, without a national state, the Zionist movement was founded in the late 19th century by secular Jews. Zionism is a Jewish political movement that in its broadest sense has supported the self-determination of the Jewish people, in a sovereign Jewish national homeland.

They used the name Zion (Sion) that referred to the fortified City of David in Jerusalem. David had been fighting the Jebusites in Jerusalem who mocked him. The Jebusites lived in Jerusalem and David led his army there to attack them. The Jebusites did not think he could get in, so they told him "You can't get in here! We could run you off, even if we couldn't see or walk!" *2Sa 5:7 David told his troops, "You will have to go up through the water tunnel to get those Jebusites. I hate people like them who can't walk or see." That's why there is still a rule that says, "Only people who can walk and see are allowed in the Temple."* *David captured the fortress on Mount Zion, then he moved there and named it David's City. He had the city rebuilt, starting with the landfill to the east.*

That's why there is still a rule that says, "Only people who can walk and see are allowed in the Temple." (on Mt. Zion) . David captured the fortress on Mount Zion and then he moved there and named it David's City. He had the city rebuilt, starting with the landfill to the east.

David loved his Royal city and wrote a Psalm about it. *Psa 48:1 A Song and Psalm for the sons of Korah. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Psa 48:2 Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King.*

This verse should be a comfort for the Christian. He has come to a safe place, he is in the company of angels and he is a citizen of heaven. *Eph 2:6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:* I think we often dwell too much upon the circumstances of this life to the neglect of our true situation. I am in heaven but I don't spend much time there. David thought about his heaven and sang about it.

Anna Laetitia Waring was something of a prodigy and writer-in-waiting probably from the moment she was conceived in Wales in 1823. Her father Elijah and an uncle Samuel were writers who no doubt influenced Anna from a young age. Her sharp mind lent her the ability to grasp Hebrew as a youngster so that she could read daily the Old Testament in its original language. She wasn't content to be a mere intellect and writer however. She also philanthropically engaged in prison ministry. She was 27 when she wrote "In Heavenly Love Abiding" in 1850.

"In heavenly love abiding, no change my heart shall fear. And safe in such confiding, for nothing changes here. The storm may roar without me, my heart may low be laid, But God is round about me, and can I be dismayed?" Anna was surrounded by the comfort of heaven.

The Greek word for heaven is ouranos = Οὐρανός where we get the name Uranus (7th planet from the sun). In Paul's writing we learn that he had an experience of heaven. *2Co 12:2 I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.* The experience was so uplifting that in order to keep Paul focused on his earthly task God gave him an infirmity.

You may recall that some time ago we looked at 'near death' experiences. People who have undergone these have come away with a change in attitude to life and a peace about death itself. I have often wondered why people cling to life if they have a hope of heaven. I felt very sad for the old man Gerald who we saw die, on TV, recently. He said, "I'm not frightened. I believe it will not be just like cutting off tape with some scissors. It might be, but either way I just have blind trust I shall not disappear completely". Here after a lifetime of opportunity to find out the truth, was a soul on the verge of eternity, ignorant of the world to come.

1Co 15:55 O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Heaven or Sin

Heb 12:22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,

Christians should know where they are. It is not difficult for other people also to see where they are either. People's lives and interests show where their lives focus. *Mat 6:20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: Mat 6:21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.* There it is. Your heart will be set on the things that you treasure. Your Thesaurus (Greek word for treasure). People who can go for days without reading God's word, without prayer and without meditation show a heart that is elsewhere.

If you don't know where you are, then you are there. You are in one of two places; heaven or sin, there is no middle state such as agnostic, uncertain or still thinking about it. You know where you are when you walk about, so it is with respect to heaven. You know you are there or you don't. There is an assurance of the relationship with God. *Rom 8:15 but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.* Assurance is no doubts and full persuasion. *Rom 4:21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.*

Assurance is a term exceptionally rich in spiritual meaning. It signifies the joyous, unwavering confidence of an intelligent faith - the security of a fearless trust. The confidence of faith is based not on "works of righteousness which we have done" *Tit 3:4 But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;*

It is founded on the high priesthood and atoning sacrifice of Christ. *Heb 10:21 And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our*

hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Assurance is the soul's apprehension of its complete emancipation from the power of evil and from consequent judgment through the atoning grace of Christ. It is the exact opposite of self-confidence.

I have read about the life of Susannah Wesley written by Arnold Dalimore. Quite a sad and depressing book. What is most sad is that in all the learning and teaching about religion, there was no assurance. It was all about working towards acceptability with God, by leading a good life, a life of works. Susannah was not converted until she was 70 years old and John and Charles Wesley were in their 30's. They had no assurance of faith.

It is sometimes thought that John Wesley's (the founder of Methodism) message started a stir in the Church of England because he began to emphasize the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. Yet what caught everyone's attention was not Wesley's preaching that we are justified by faith in Christ, rather than by our works, but the preaching that we will receive in our hearts an inner assurance that we are justified.

He said, "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for my salvation and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine and saved me from the law of sin and death." If we do not have this we have nothing to give to others.

Susannah was last of the 25 children born to Dr. Samuel Annesley on the 20th January 1669. She had confessed to John, that until an experience of hers in September 1739, when she was 70 years old, she herself had been a stranger both to the doctrine and experience of assurance. Susannah died on July 23rd 1742. John Wesley had these words engraved on her headstone in Bunhill Fields.

True daughter of affliction, she, Inured to pain and misery, Mourn'd a long night of griefs and fears, A legal night of seventy years. The Father then reveal'd His Son, Him in the broken bread made known; She knew and felt her sins forgiven, And found the earnest of her heaven.

Susannah had made it to Mount Zion, City of the living God.

Myriads of Angels

Heb 12:22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,

Today we look at the myriads of angels (Greek μυριαστιν αγγελων = angel, is a transliteration of the Greek word). John the Baptist was an angel. *Mal 3:1 Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me:* An angel is a messenger.

There are those angel beings, that are not born of earth but of heaven. *Job 38:4 Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Job 38:5 Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Job 38:6 Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; Job 38:7 when the*

morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? Psa 148:2 Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts. Psa 148:3 Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light. Psa 148:4 Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens. Psa 148:5 Let them praise the name of the LORD: for he commanded, and they were created.

These created beings existed before mankind but were made for the purpose of serving God and mankind. *Heb 1:14 Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?*

Angels do not die. *Luk 20:36 Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.* They appear to be either asexual or non-reproductive. *Mar 12:25 For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven.* They are also emotional beings. *Luk 2:13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*

Angels appear to represent us in the presence of God. Jesus said: *Mat 18:10 Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.* This is a threat to the disciples who despised the small children. This must mean more than that the angels just sit in God's presence. Jesus is saying that they are not without representatives in the presence of God who will do more than just stand by and see them ignored.

Is it then logical to assume that all of us have angels in the presence of God? Angels on our shoulders? We should be careful of constructing doctrines out of scriptures that lack a weight of evidence. However it is clear that angels often intervene in the life of men, not just in the Old Testament but also in the New. *Act 10:22 And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.*

Angels intervene in the world of mankind. *Act 12:8 And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.* They can also bring judgement. *Act 12:23 And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.*

They also provide strength and comfort. *Act 27:22 And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve,* We might ask if Christ is sufficient for the believer why send angels? Well that is God's way. He clearly does this perhaps to encourage us that in the spiritual battles of this life we are not fighting alone.

Angels walk the fires of life with us. *Dan 3:25 He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.*

Angels walk amongst us. *Heb 13:2 Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.* Lot did just that and the angels delivered him. *Gen 19:1 And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground.*

Perhaps one of the nicest thoughts about angels is that they are with you at the end of life. *Luk 16:22 And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;* They escort you to glory.

"Oh, come Angel Band, come and around me stand. Oh bear me away on your snow white wings to my immortal home".

The Church Of the First Born

Heb 12:23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,

We are the church of the firstborn, the church of the **prototokos** (Greek: First + produced). In a general sense, this refers to the first child. *Mat 1:25 And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.* The Jehovah's Witnesses try to reinterpret this word prototokos. In *Col 1:15 Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature:* It is used by Jehovah's Witnesses to imply Christ was created.

The next verse totally destroys that concept. *Col 1:16 For by him were all things created,* How could he have created himself if ALL things were created by him? Only created things come from him. So in Colossians we are looking at a different meaning to prototokos than being born. In the Psalms speaking of David it says: *Psa 89:27 Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth.*

In this Psalm God is elevating David to Prototokos firstborn. David was not the first born son of Jesse but God gives him the position of a firstborn. It is then a position of rank. Prototokos is a status. *Col 1:18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence.* Bear in mind others had come back from the dead before Jesus.

It is for us however a status given by mercy and grace. It is unmerited by us but granted through the merit of Christ. *Rom 8:29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.* We are the Firstborn.

In the book of Exodus we read of the first Passover and the relationship of God to the firstborn. *Exo 12:29 And it came to pass, that at midnight the LORD smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn (*LXX prototokos*) of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle.*

Those who failed to acknowledge God's firstborn, albeit in a type, those who failed to cover themselves in the blood of the lamb, were killed. Now there must have been firstborn that could undertake to put the blood on the doors of their houses. There must also have been others who by reason of age and infirmity could not. These firstborn were generally helpless and only lived if their fathers obeyed the word of God. It was an act of faith. *Heb 11:28 Through faith he kept the Passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them.*

Can you imagine the horror with which the godly parents received the news of the coming angel of death? Can you imagine how carefully they would have prepared their homes to avoid the intrusion? How diligent they would have been to follow God's instructions?

There is a lesson here that parents have a duty to protect their family and their young and bring them to Christ. I believe that allowing religious choices is as good as condemning them to death because the nature of sin will drive them away from Christ if they are left to themselves.

I was reading in Spurgeon's autobiography about a mother who came to Christ in later life through his ministry. When she spoke of her new found faith in Christ to her children none were interested. She was not a bad mother in human terms but coming to Christ had made her realise what was really important in life. By that time she realised it was too late to do anything.

She said, "You can't bend a tree; I ought to have bent the twig when I could have done it". As she wept before the young preacher she bemoaned, "Oh that I could have my time again and have all my children around me as little ones that I might teach them about my blessed Saviour! They are all beyond me now. What can I do?"

The firstborn of God are precious in His sight. To those who come to Him He will in no wise cast out and like those ancient fathers in Egypt protect and deliver his firstborn from the angel of death.

Written In Heaven

Heb 12:23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,

What does it mean to be written in heaven? What does the word written imply? The Greek Old Testament uses this word. *Jdg 8:14 And he caught a youth of the men of Succoth, and inquired of him; and he wrote down for him the chief men of Succoth, and the elders thereof, seventy-seven men. Darby Pro 22:20 Have not I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge, Luk 2:1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. AV Luk 2:1 But it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census should be made of all the habitable world. Darby.*

The word written in the book of Hebrews means "to list". (Greek ἀπογράφω, write off (a copy or list)). You may have seen "Schindler's List" a 1993 American biographical drama film about Oskar Schindler, a German businessman who saved the lives of more than a thousand, mostly Polish-Jewish refugees, during the Holocaust by employing them in his factories. Today there are more than

6,000 descendants of Schindler's Jews living in the USA and Europe, and many in Israel. Before the Second World War the Jewish population of Poland was 3.5 million. Today there are between 3,000 and 4,000 left. Oskar and Emilie Schindler were recognized as Righteous Among the Nations in 1993. In 1962 a tree was planted in Schindler's honour in the Avenue of the Righteous at Yad Vashem in Israel.

Yad vashem is a memorial to the victims of the holocaust, יְד וָשֵׁם (Lit. a hand and a name). God said this speaking of the strangers that is you and I. *Isa 56:5 Even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.* Better than sons and of daughters.

When you visit a cemetery you just see names. There is very little to help you understand the lives of the people. For someone coming across dear "Jim Carswell's" grave they would see a name, but for us who knew him we still can picture and recall his life but that too will eventually be lost to the world. All that remains are the names of those who passed through. They remain on some list of persons interred in the churchyard but what they were is lost.

For us though, we shall ever be remembered because we are in the memory of the eternal God. He gives us "**a place and a name**". When as our text says we are written in heaven it does not merely mean our names are in heaven. It is what we are and who we are. "church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven". God uses the word "written" that can also be used of a "census". A census is much more than a list of names. It contains all sorts of personal information.

Not just that but we were written from eternity past. *Psa 139:16 Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.* In God's book before the generations of our families were born we were written. Everything about us was there from beginning to end. Written beyond this life, recorded beyond the physical universe, beyond the material world. As such it is untouched by the laws of this Universe.

Judgement day is revealed to us as the day when secrets are revealed. We live through a time when people from all walks of life complain about their privacy being violated. The privacy in many cases to cover up personal sin. God is not held by man's privacy laws and all will be shouted from the roof tops. *Rev 20:12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.*

The book of life stands as the counterbalance to the book of sins. Justice does not hold a balance, Justice holds the books. *Rev 20:15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.* The book of life has been written in crimson ink, the blood of Christ. The Yad Vashem is the pierced hand and name of Jesus. God remembers us because He remembers His son.

That is the importance of being written in Heaven.

Our God the Judge

Heb 12:23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,

So far we have seen in these past verses where we have come to: But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, What the place is: the heavenly Jerusalem, Who is there: and to an innumerable company of angels, Where we are: To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and Who is over all: to God the Judge of all.

Many in the churches today are encouraged like Lot's wife to look backwards rather than forwards. They look back to earthly Israel, earthly Jerusalem, earthly Zion and the earthly Jew with the thought that these are significant to the Christians future rather than see that God has given us already the reality of these things. Our Alma mater (Latin: "nourishing mother") is not in earthly Israel it is in heaven. *Gal 4:26 But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.* We are there already. *Eph 2:6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:*

And there, presiding over all is God, the Judge of all. The word judge (Greek κριτής = krites) is where we get the word critic from. A critic may be inclined to find fault but more likely to exercise skilled judgement of the truth. God is a critic and so should we be also because it is a Divine attribute. Criticism can be constructive or destructive. We should apply constructive criticism to OUR lives rather than to others as part of our spiritual meditations then we would have a more peaceful life.

1Co 11:31 For if we would judge (διακρίνω = diakrino) ourselves, we should not be judged (κρίνω = krino). 1Co 11:32 But when we are judged (κρίνω krino), we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned (Greek κατακρίνω katakrinoo) with the world. Christians are afraid of judging. They either think that it is ungracious to judge or unloving but I think that it is mainly because if they make judgements they fall into the same condemnation. *Rom 2:1 Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest (κρίνω = Krino): for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest (κατακρίνω = katakrinō) thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.* Judge or criticise by all means but do not be a hypocrite. *Mat 7:1 Judge not, that ye be not judged.*

How is God presented to us in this verse? With literally over 200 names to use for God what does the Holy Spirit use? God is viewed as the Judge. We are not taken before the Creator of all, the Redeemer of all, the Saviour of all but the Judge of all. We are not taken before the God of Love, the good shepherd or the healer of hearts. Why? Because at the centre of God's Kingdom is righteousness. *Rom 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.* We are taken to the core of our existence and that is a moral existence.

The first view of heaven is the view of the Judge. That is where we first approach God because unless we plead our guilt and request and receive Divine forgiveness then we are still in our sin and

dead to God. You don't get to heaven by giving your life to Jesus, to the contrary He must give HIS life to YOU and that life is given by the Judge who justifies the sinner. We see the consequences to a society that rejects the Judge of the universe.

Man has replaced Justice with tolerance and that in the end spawns lawlessness.

Just Men Made Perfect

Heb 12:23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,

We now examine the final concept in our verse “just men made perfect”. What does it mean to be a “just” man? Is it a man who pays his taxes, helps his neighbour, gives to the poor, is honest to all, doesn’t break the law and always tells the truth? Do you know a man can do all of these and not be just? Isaiah wrote: *Isa 64:6 But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.* The Hebrew “filthy rags” would literally be translated “sanitary towels”. Righteousness must have a different blood on it.

Let us not confuse good character with being just. Being just has two parts. Certainly man must be just to man, but he must also be just to God. The highest obligations of a creature must be not to his fellow-creatures but to his Creator. However just a man may be to another man if he is unjust to God he cannot escape without the severest penalty. The philanthropist may say I have never injured my fellow-man, I am just before men,” yet it does not make the man's character perfect. A mother Theresa can end in hell if she is not just with God. Good works do not work justification.

Jesus story of the men who went to pray illustrates this. *Luk 18:10 Two men went up into the Temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. Luk 18:11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. Luk 18:12 I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. Luk 18:13 And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. Luk 18:14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.* The Pharisee was a “good” man. I think that he was right to thank God he wasn’t like other men and like him I thank Christ I am not an unbeliever. He had his eye on doing what was right and we cannot condemn him for that. He was probably far more generous than we are and probably more religious than we are. So far so good? The publican however had a better view. He saw his relation beyond that with man. He was in need of God’s mercy. He was the despairing sinner at the feet of God. He needed justifying.

Justification is a forensic (legal) act of God. It is nothing that we can earn or work for. *Gal 2:16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.* It is through this that God gives us

peace. *Rom 5:1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:*

Now what does this justification or being just mean? Does it mean that we never sin again? Does it mean that we are perfect? No to both. *1Jn 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* There it is. We can be just but we are also a just sinner. We have the legal status of one acquitted in a court of law yet with our nature unchanged. That is why the first steps of the life of faith are steps of renewal. *Rom 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.*

I would expect to see Christians change with time and go on changing. If they didn't keep changing I would worry for them, as I would for a child that never grew in height. Yet I would never expect to see a perfect person. It is an aspiration for sure. *Eph 4:13 until we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, at the full-grown man, at the measure of the stature of the fulness of the Christ;*

Here in heaven before the throne of God, we appear as the "just men made perfect". The word perfect is from telos (Greek. τέλος) meaning a goal, the point aimed at, as a limit. It's where we get the word **telescope** from.

Perfection is the completion or goal of our life. It is where we are finally transformed into the image that we so imperfectly strive after. What we cannot achieve in this life will surely be completed for us. *Rev 7:9 After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;*

The Name of Jesus

Heb 12:22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, Heb 12:23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, Heb 12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

As these verses unfold to us it is as if we are making our own journey to heaven. We approach mount Zion and then Jerusalem comes into our view, as we continue past the countless angel bands we see God's throne and before Him our brothers and sisters made perfect. Our journey finishes with them at the feet of Jesus the mediator of the new covenant.

We see Jesus. What does that name mean? *Mat 1:21 And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.* Jesus means Jehovah Saviour and He was named by an angel not His parents. He was not the first person to bear the name because there was another saviour in the Older Testament who brought Israel into the Promised Land. His name was Joshua. Joshua is the Hebrew form of Jesus and he was a shadow or type of Christ.

The Jews feared to utter the name of God. They could never speak to Jehovah by name. Perhaps this is the reason there is not much said about prayer in the Old Testament and religion was conducted mainly through the priesthood. I am not saying that people did not pray but there is no instruction on it. If you did well you were blessed. You didn't have to pray for it, it was the reward of legal obedience.

The disciples were unsure how to pray and it required tuition. *Luk 11:1 And it came to pass, that, as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.* God's name was and still is sacred but God has invited us to speak to Him through His son. The New Testament is where prayer becomes personal.

How wonderfully familiar the Name of Jesus is. It is a first name and we are on first name terms with the creator. What possibilities does that open up? *Joh 14:13 And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.* I think that many people look at that verse and think "well, it doesn't work". For many it probably doesn't because we look at it from our own selfish viewpoint. What's in it for me? If we want to see that verse in action we should be looking for opportunities to glorify Christ.

That raises the question about our relationship with Jesus. Are we in life to continue His works or are we there to do our own works supposedly in His Name? Glorify Him or glorify me? Have we ever taken time out to ask Him what we should be doing in His Name? Have we ever even asked Him for something to do in His Name? Have we ever noticed Him working around our lives?

When we appear before the throne of God dragging our life's work with us will it find any approval? There are those who are going to be greatly disappointed because in all their "doings" it did not have "Jesus" written on it. *Mat 7:22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?*

Ah you will say! But I did it in good faith I thought that I was doing it in your name. Did you ever ask? The German army had on its belt buckles "Gott Mit Uns", God with us. They could have just as easily written "Jesus". Why? Because Jesus is God with us. *Mat 1:23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.*



They would of course have had to answer the question were they doing this in God's name for the Glory of God? We are come to Jesus in our verse today. What does that really mean in our lives? I pray you take that away and meditate on it in the coming weeks.

Jesus the Saviour

Heb 12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

We continue to look today at Jesus the Saviour. I have many times heard people bemoaning the thought that they are poor Christians. It is often more an excuse for their current life than a cry for help. If that is true and they are rotten Christians then it means that they have a rotten saviour. They have an incompetent and incapable saviour, one who cannot deliver them to the utmost contrary to *Heb 7:25 Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*

What makes Jesus a Saviour at our individual level is our willingness to be saved. Yes people may want some of the benefits of salvation such as eternal life without eternal punishment but not want to give up their sinful life. They want rewards and benefits without personal sacrifice, a sort of passive Christianity. I will coin a phrase "passive salvation" as opposed to those who actively pursue and work it out. *Php 2:12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.* They are happy to have someone do something for them as long as they do not have to do something for themselves like the sluggard. *Pro 19:24 A slothful man hideth his hand in his bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again.*

These people become religious passengers on a bus to hell. They exhibit another symptom of passive salvation which is the lack of interest in scripture, teaching and doctrine (support). This is not for them it is for the wild academics. The ministry of God's word is central to the gospel just as it was central to Jesus' ministry. *Mat 4:23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.* Indifference to the word of God is not the mark of a "saved" person.

Another symptom of passive salvation is that their worship is self-centred, filling a personal need rather than focusing on the Saviour. *Mar 7:7 Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.* Worship like Saul's. *1Sa 15:22 And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.* Rather than find out what God wants they gravitate to a worship zone that gives them comfort, irrespective of the Biblical foundation for that worship. That's how people can accept Catholicism or Anglicanism because it is not founded on faith it is founded on feeling.

We may adopt the Calvinistic view that "once saved we are always saved", which is certainly true of God's chosen people but these "chosen" people also have a great respect towards that salvation. They do not assume that it comes without personal responsibility. *Heb 2:3 How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation;* Neither do they assume that it comes without personal obedience. *Heb 5:9 And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;*

The Apostle Paul is very conscious that salvation requires effort. *1Co 9:27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.* You see Paul never takes his salvation for granted. *Php 2:12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*

Each and every one of us who professes to be a Christian will nurture that relationship with Jesus in order to make that bond of salvation secure. We did not just need saving in the past but we need saving today and every day. Why else would Jesus encourage us with the words of the model prayer. *Luk 11:4 And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.* It is because salvation is an ongoing process.

Jesus the Creator

Heb 12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

We continue to look today at Jesus as the Creator. *Col 1:16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:* We have seen the intricacy of the human design and the forethought that brought it to its perfection and thus we stand before a supreme intelligence and omnipotent architect. In some ways after our creation studies, I felt that miracles were quite ordinary in the light of these every day miracles of life.

1Ch 16:8 Give thanks unto the LORD, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the people. 1Ch 16:9 Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him, talk ye of all his wondrous works. This is why all Christians should take an interest in natural sciences because through His creation we shall be able to talk more of His works. From the day that churches separated Science from Religion they cut off one of their arms and have been poorer for it ever since. Science is about God's works. Robert Boyle the Christian and scientist was a pioneer in allying natural theology - the belief that God's attributes could be discerned in the natural world with empirical scientific inquiry. *Rom 1:20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:*

As Christians we are grateful to the Father that Jesus is one who we can relate to as a human but we should never forget that behind that personage is the awesome power that created the Universe. *1Ch 16:25 For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised: he also is to be feared above all gods. 1Ch 16:26 For all the gods of the people are idols: but the LORD made the heavens.* We have a relationship with our Creator. *Act 17:29 Forasmuch then as we are the offspring (literally: genus) of God.* What then stands in our way? We do! Yes we are our own worst enemies when it comes to engaging with the power of God in our lives.

Lack of faith and lack of trust is our downfall. It is hard to believe that in one aspect of life we can overpower the Creator. Our lack of faith can inhibit His working (it is a self-limitation of God). *Mar*

6:5 Jesus could not work any miracles there, except to heal a few sick people by placing his hands on them. He was surprised that the people did not have any faith. CEV

The worst part of this Bible story is that it took place among His own friends and family. It is often among those who profess closeness to Christ that we see the greatest betrayal of faith. Back in the '90's, Pope John Paul II proclaimed that the theory (of evolution) is 'more than just a hypothesis' and that evolution is compatible with Christian faith. The Archbishop of Canterbury has condemned the teaching of creationism in schools. In an interview with Guardian editor Alan Rusbridger, Dr Rowan Williams said the Biblical creation stories do not belong in the same category as evolutionary theory (right there then)". He explained: "My worry is creationism can end up reducing the doctrine of creation, rather than enhancing it." This ignorant primate is an enemy of Christ.

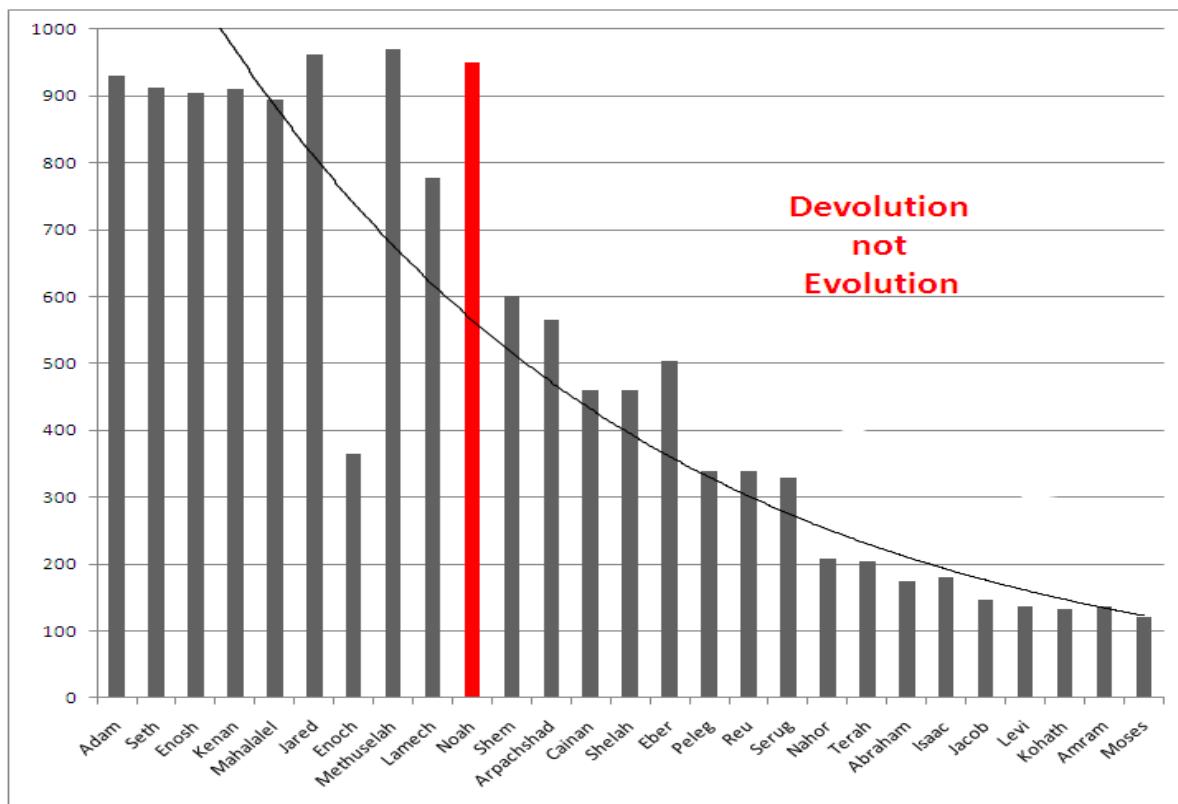
Now can you tell me how these people represent Jesus, the Creator? They represent him as an ignorant carpenter who obviously was delusional, yet what does John say? *Joh 1:3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.* You can see why the Catholic and Anglican churches are impotent. They are led my men who descended from monkeys. Men riddled with unbelief as a cancer, destroying the body. What works does the Creator perform amongst them these days in their unbelief? They are left to invent their own "Gospel for Dummies".

I find in His creation the blessing and comfort of the Divine purpose. That He would lavish so much power and commitment in order to build a universe, to make a home for ME and in my sinful state, come to rescue ME and take ME to an even greater future, demands my humility and wonder.

Jesus the Healer

Heb 12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

We continue to look now at Jesus as the healer. Before we consider healing however let us consider the causes of sickness that lead to the need for healing. The first hint we get that things are not right follows the entrance of sin and death. That Eve should bear children was the original will of God but it was a punishment that henceforth she was to bear them in sorrow i.e. with pains which threatened her own life as well as that of the child. *Gen 3:16 Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children.* Humanity is on the decline and if we look at the life span of the patriarchs it diminishes exponentially over time especially after the flood.



John Sanford the Cornell professor of biological sciences shows, that it is in the nature of genetic information to erode and degenerate with time (genetic Entropy). The number of mutations may be as high as 600 per person per generation. Humankind has a limited shelf life and we would assume that this followed in the wake of sin. Also as we age, we accumulate cellular damage, physical wear and tear on our system, environmental damage, and lifestyle and life risks, all resulting in the natural increase in age related illnesses. Does God heal worn teeth, joints, baldness and wrinkled skin?

Illness and disability may also be a consequence of God's sovereign purpose not sin. *Joh 9:2 And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Joh 9:3 Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.* It may though be a product of sin especially among believers. *Num 12:10 And the cloud departed from off the Tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow: and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was leprous.* *1Co 11:29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.*

Illness may also have demonic origins as was the case with Job. *Job 1:12 And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD.* Job's so called comforters try to explain the problem of suffering in terms of sin rather than sovereignty and Job called them physicians of no value. *Job 13:4 But ye are forgers of lies, ye are all physicians of no value.* There is clearly demonic oppression but also possession and Jesus encounters many demonic illnesses. *Mar 9:17 And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit;* So called psychiatric problems and mental health issues may also have their roots in demon possession. *Mar*

9:22 And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.

We see then that there are many causes of sickness in this world but not in the new world Christ has prepared for us. *Rev 21:4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.* Healing is part of the demonstration of Christ's power over sin and death. *Luk 5:22 But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts? Luk 5:23 Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk? Luk 5:24 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house.*

The name Raphael (Hebrew רִפָּאֵל) means "It is God who heals", "God Heals" and is derived from a root word meaning to mend (by stitching) to repair. When Christ heals the blind or the leper He is repairing them or putting them in order. We might say that he is "patching them up".

Now we might ask the question why doesn't a loving God "patch up" everybody? Why aren't all people healed when they cry to God? I remember many years ago when we first moved to Bracknell that there was a lady from Bracknell Baptist Church who yearned for the gift of healing. I believe that at the time her mother was quite ill. Yet if she had been given that gift it would have been used indiscriminately, that is without the direction of the Spirit and I am sure that is why she did not get it. Now consider this, that Jesus possessed of all this power, yet waited 30 years before he exercised it. *Joh 2:11 This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.*

How many lame, blind, deaf, dumb, lepers, cripples, sick, dying and despairing souls did Jesus pass by and not heal in his early life? Jesus clearly used his powers in obedience to the purpose of God as He Himself said. *Joh 5:30 I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.*

It was never God's purpose to heal everybody in this life and that is why we still have sickness and like the poor it is with us for all time. Sickness like poverty can wring empathy and sympathy from our souls; it can encourage charity, love and concern. It can make us think about our mortality and if that thought takes root prepare us for eternity.

So how should we approach sickness and disease? Submit to it or fight it? One thing is for sure and that is that healing is a temporary fix. The "patch" doesn't last forever and you will eventually die. What should you do? I think that the first resort (not the last resort) is to converse with your heavenly Father. King Asa chose to go to the doctors rather than God. *2Ch 16:12 And Asa in the thirty and ninth year of his reign was diseased in his feet, until his disease was exceeding great: yet in his disease he sought not to the LORD, but to the physicians.*

Isn't it a strange thing that we are often drawn to doctors rather than God even though the Lord is the prime cause of all illness? *Deu 32:39 See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand.* Surely

the first thing we should do knowing the range of contributory factors to illness is to see if there is a spiritual reason? Yet we fall on the doctors because we never dream that we could be wrong with God. How blind is that? What does it say about our relationship with the Lord that we only trust Him to second place over doctors? Doctors will never cure a spiritual problem, they will mask it.

Within the church healing is not necessarily through someone with the gift of healing. It is through the officers of the church. *Jas 5:14 Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: Jas 5:15 And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.* These verses show us that this covers both physically and spiritually contracted sicknesses. Many churches cannot do this because they do not have elders.

So why would we have physicians? Luke was a physician but we do not know if he continued to practice. In Luke's day medicine was in its infancy and often linked with the dark arts. In the New Testament the word translated witchcraft is pharmakeia. *Gal 5:19 Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Gal 5:20 Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Gal 5:21 Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.* Pharmacy was originally associated with potions and charms. We do not question however the exchange of good advice on healthcare, after all, this was a task that God gave to the Levites. Paul gives Timothy some dietary advice. *1Ti 5:23 Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.*

We encourage the exploration and understanding of the natural world in order to Praise the Lord for His works and creation. Science, biology, and medicine are all disciplines that we can use under God to bless mankind. All of these should be subject to the creator and the warning is that if we use them we should not use them as a means of avoiding the confrontation with the Lord who made "the wound" in the first place. Remember that doctors only "patch" you up. The real question is "Are you ready to go to the Lord today?" because if you are not why should there ever be a day that you will be ready? Patches are temporary Christ is eternal.

Paul received a wound that the Lord refused to heal. *2Co 12:7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. 2Co 12:8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. 2Co 12:9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

Notice that Paul understands the spiritual cause of his infirmity (satan), he understood the purpose of the infirmity (humility) and he sought the Lord and got an answer. For Paul his infirmity was not a burden it was a cause of rejoicing. It was chronic, that is it went on and on but he was sustained by Christ. The worst thing is to be sick and not sustained by Christ's power. Illness can be God's way of bringing you closer to Himself and developing a deeper dependence. Illness can improve your prayer life and devotion. Illness can have a spiritual upside.

Illness eventually comes as a warning that we are declining. It comes as the autumn leaves signal the approaching winter, so illness prepares us for death. It may give us time to prepare for the end of this life and the beginning of the life to come. How desperate for those who have no hope, approaching an abyss in ignorance?

On his deathbed the preacher Charles Simeon smiled brightly and asked the people gathered in his room, "What do you think especially gives me comfort at this time?" When they all remained silent he exclaimed, "The creation! I ask myself, 'Did Jehovah create the world or did I?' He did! Now if He made the world and all the rolling spheres of the universe, He certainly can take care of me. Into Jesus' hands I can safely commit my spirit!"

I want to conclude by taking you to another deathbed. When Jesus arrives it is too late and he is berated by the relatives. *Joh 11:21 Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.*

Now where are you standing when you watch this scene in your mind's eye, at the cemetery in Bethany? Are you in the crowd standing with Jesus? We often see it from that point of view. Come with me and stand in the grave of Lazarus. In the dark hot tomb, the grave clothes shudder. The body stands upright and drifts towards the entrance. The noise of chipping and hammering releases the stone at the entrance and the light burst in. Now what do you see from Lazarus' perspective? You see Jesus. That is all that matters for although He was late often to treat us He will never be too late to meet us.

Jesus the Comforter

Heb 12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

We continue to look at Jesus as the Comforter. Jesus said: *Joh 14:18 I will not leave you comfortless (όρφανός = orphans); I will come to you.* An orphan is a child permanently bereaved of or abandoned by his or her parents or who has lost both parents. An orphan stated "I fail to know why it happens in such a way that after the parent(s) pass away, their children start testing the wrath of their death, as these people who remain to take care of the children, they again make them pass through regrettable experiences". Being an orphan is a terrible thing.

Jesus said that he would not leave us in that state. We do not have to walk this world as spiritual orphans separated from our Father. *Rom 8:1 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.* Jesus provides a comforter. *Joh 14:16 And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter (gk παράκλητος = paraklētos) that he may abide with you for ever;* The translators of the King James Version chose the Latin word comforter (confortare to strengthen much; con- + fortis strong) rather than paraklete (gk to call beside, exhort or console) but comfort has much of the sense of the word.

This word for paraklete was used in the first century of one called in to support another or give him aid. It was a technical term to describe a lawyer in the Greek law courts, one who was called in to aid the accused. This word denotes one who acts in another's behalf as a mediator, an intercessor or a comforter. It is just this sense that John uses it. *1Jn 2:1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate (paraklete) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:*

You no doubt have seen that sentimental wall hanging of the single line of footprints in the sand? "The years when you have seen only one set of footprints, my child, is when I carried you." Yeah? I don't see that Jesus carries any one of us but He does share our burden. *Mat 11:28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.* There it is the comfort, the strengthening from Christ sharing the burden and fortifying the soul.

Perhaps our problem if we see little of the Comforter in our lives is that we do not look for Him in our lives. Stephen did. *Act 7:55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God,* It may also be that there are many places in our lives where we do not want Jesus to go with us or where He would even go. Relationships are cultivated. God may send the Comforter but do we receive Him?

Now what is the great mark of the relationship with the Comforter? It is that the person has a memory of God's words. *Joh 14:26 But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.* Now you will say I cannot remember scripture. Yet there are children in Islamic schools, madrassas who learn the Koran by heart. If we do not recall scripture it is because it is not in our heart and it is not in our memory because we do not rehearse it enough to become part of our long term memory. We don't give the Comforter a chance.

Many Christians aspire to be spiritual but unless the word of God is at work in their lives it is impossible. Here is the way to identify a spiritual individual. *1Co 14:37 If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.* Only by this working with the Comforter, building upon the foundation of scripture in our life do we become a complete individual. *2Ti 3:16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.*

Jesus the Good Shepherd

Heb 12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

We look now at Jesus as the Good Shepherd. *Joh 10:14 I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.*

In a time when we have little contact with animals other than pets it may be hard for us to understand the concept of a shepherd. In Palestine in Jesus' day many families would have kept sheep for milk, cheese, sacrifice, skins and meat. Sheep were an essential part of life so it is not surprising that sheep are mentioned more than any other animal in the Bible - 500 times! Shepherding was one of the first occupations and the first person on earth murdered was a shepherd. *Gen 4:4 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering:*

Abraham, Moses and David were shepherds, perhaps because it was a proving ground for leadership and stewardship. *2Sa 7:8 Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I took thee from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel:* It seems that David had lived so long with sheep that he had more sympathy with them than with people and Nathan uses this to convict David of his sin with Bathsheba.

Just as there were good shepherds, there were bad shepherds. *Joh 10:13 The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. Jer 23:1 Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the LORD.* Why? Because he saw the wolf coming and thought more of his own life. There are those in churches who are called pastors (pastor is Latin for shepherd) and these are God's gift to the churches. *Eph 4:11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;* I don't see many pastors fighting off the wolves in these days. They seem to have made pets of them.

That should lead us to the focus for today. We should not trust our lives to men but to The Lord. *1Pe 2:25 For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.* Because men are fallible we should not put our total reliance in them and worship the cult of personality however good they are. Millions today are trusting men to deliver them to eternity rather than making that relationship with their Pastor in Heaven.

We go back to that Psalm of David (Psalm 23) to understand what Jehovah (The Lord) does as our shepherd. Lets us read it now and see what the promises are. It is almost a creed, a mantra:

You shepherd me so I shall not want, I shall lie down in green pastures, I will walk by peaceful waters, My soul will be restored, I will walk on righteous paths, I am not afraid to die, I will not be afraid of evil because You are with me, You comfort me, You give me a feast and my enemies look on, You pour oil over me and fill me beyond measure, everywhere I go I am followed by Your kindness and love and at the end, I shall live with You forever. Amen

In one of the churches that I went to in Ghana the service started with a mantra like this. The whole congregation, literally thousands of people, stood and spoke out loud their expectation and position in Christ. It was both moving and uplifting. It was also a lovely way to start a service of worship because it brought them in from the false world that we inhabit all week, to the real world that God lives in. It was a reminder of who we are and we need that reminder daily.

The shepherd psalm was for David a job description, if ever he was asked "what do you do?" He had God's mind for his task. He also did his job as God would have perfectly done it, something not many

of us could say but shepherding was one of the first employments for mankind. What did the sheep have to do? Not much. Just listen and follow and with that all the benefits fell into place. Jesus said: *Joh 10:27 My sheep know my voice, and I know them. They follow me.*

Jesus the Angel of God

Heb 12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

We look next at Jesus as the Angel of God. Today I want to answer the question “did Jesus appear in the Older Testament”? It is an interesting question because it asks “did Jesus appear before His birth in Bethlehem”? We shall learn a theological word today. It is Theophany and it means “appearance of God”. Was Jesus a Theophany of the Old Testament and is this the person called “The Angel of The Lord”?

I cannot explain how God became man, how He compressed himself in time and space, how He could be contained with the limitations of a baby, how God could die or how God could return to His eternity and immortality. Yet these things are taught as facts in the Bible. One of the great facts is that the birth in Bethlehem was the revelation of the everlasting God rejected by the Jews. *Mic 5:2 But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.* This child of Bethlehem had many names. *Isa 9:6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.* You read it and you can hear the chorus in Handel’s Messiah extolling the Majesty of God.

So there can be no doubt that Jesus existed in all eternity as God and so was present in the Older Testament. He was in the beginning. *Joh 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Joh 1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.* Now the scripture says that no man has seen (observed or literally “stared at” God). *Joh 6:46 Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father.* This leaves us with the question of who is the person who appears as the Angel of God, is clearly visible and behaves as God in the Old Testament? See Genesis 18.

The Lord appears as one of the 3 men. *Gen 18:1 And the LORD (JEHOVAH) appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; Gen 18:13 And the LORD (JEHOVAH) said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?* Perhaps also the Lord left the other angels to go and rescue Lot from Sodom? It is clear that Abraham spoke with God who showed Himself in the form of a man. This manifestation, this appearance is called a Theophany. It is suggested that this person is none other than Christ Jesus in the Old Testament.

Other appearances are in;

Exo 3:2 And the angel of the LORD (JEHOVAH) appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: Exo 3:4 And when the LORD (JEHOVAH) saw that he turned aside to see, God (ELOHIM)

called unto him out of the midst of the bush,..... Gen 22:11 And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. Gen 22:12 And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me..... Jos 5:13 And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand:Jdg 6:11 And there came an angel of the LORD, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah Zec 1:11 And they answered the angel of the LORD.

There are instances then where we see the manifestation of God in the Old Testament as an angel, yet an angel who acts and speaks as God. This has been explained and accepted by many as the manifestation of Christ in the Old Testament. He who said, *Before Abraham was, I am.*

Jesus the Bread of Life

Heb 12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

We continue to look at Jesus as the Bread of Life. *Joh 6:35 And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. Joh 6:48 I am that bread of life.*

Joh 6:33 For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. How appropriate then that Jesus was born in Bethlehem because Bethlehem means the House of Bread. From God's bakery comes the Bread of Life. Because bread is so important for supporting life on Earth it is called the staff (support) of life. *Psa 105:16 Moreover he called for a famine upon the land: he brake the whole staff of bread.*

We have to look at Jesus the bread of life in the context of John Chapter 6. It starts with the miracle of the loaves, the feeding of the five thousand. There was also much left over which was gathered up. *Joh 6:12 Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten.* There was no waste. I digress to share an observation by A Wilder-Smith that God's creation is very efficient and that God does not waste anything or throw things away.

This miracle convinced the 5,000 that this was "The Prophet". *Joh 6:14 Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.* See also *Deu 18:15 The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken;* By this Christ is linked to Moses which is the next thread in our story after Jesus shows another example of His mastery of creation, by walking on water.

Jesus points out to the multitude that followed Him that they were freeloaders following the meal ticket. They had a short term survival strategy. *Joh 6:27 Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but*

for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed. They lived only for this life. Joh 6:32 Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. We are shown that there is a relationship between the Manna and Christ.

When the Israelites first saw the Manna they didn't know what it was. *Exo 16:15 And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna: for they wist not what it was. And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat.* The Hebrew Manna literally signifies "What is this?" It supported a whole generation during the travels through the wilderness. Its significance was that God would keep His people alive and provide for them.

When Jesus declares. *Joh 6:48 I am that bread of life.* He leads us into a central practice of the New Testament the Lord's Table. *1Co 11:24 And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.* The Eucharist as the Lord's Table is sometimes called is a reaffirmation of the New Covenant. *1Co 11:26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.* Yet it is far more than showing the Lord's death.

The Lord's Table is a symbol of our dependence upon Christ. It is a confession of reliance. If eat the bread without the attitude of reliance we are eating unworthily. What is the point of that? We have relegated the table to a ritual without any depth of meaning. It is something to satisfy our "Now". It shows like the 5,000, we still live for ourselves.

Dorothy L Sayer wrote "Hell is the enjoyment of having one's own way forever". That is not eternal life it is eternal death.

Jesus the Everlasting Father

Heb 12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

We continue to look at Jesus as the Everlasting Father. *Isa 9:6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.* There are a number of ways of describing a "father", as a procreator (offspring) as the male parent, as a creator, founder or originator or as one who acknowledges responsibility for you. We might see Jesus in all of these descriptions.

The unity of Jesus and the Father is beyond doubt. *Joh 10:30 I and my Father are one. Joh 10:38 But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him. Joh 14:9 Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?*

Yet Jesus and the Father are also distinct for Christ is not the Father yet in a manner He is. In Isaiah He is so called. It is easy to make it appear Christ is not the Father but is distinct from him since he was with the Father from eternity. *Joh 17:5 And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.*

Christ frequently calls the first Person his Father, He prayed to Him, He is our advocate with Him and is the way to Him. He is said to be sent by the Father, to come from Him and to go to Him and many things are said of Christ that cannot be said of the Father, such as his being made flesh, suffering and dying. The person of Jesus unfolds from His birth in Bethlehem and reaches its greatest revelation in the empty tomb. *Heb 5:5 So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee.* *Act 13:33 God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.* This declaration that Jesus was begotten from the dead is the declaration of Kingship and Priesthood (Psalm 2).

So in what sense do we turn to Jesus as everlasting Father? I think that it is because chosen people were given to Him as His children and offspring in covenant who are adopted into that family that is named of Him and who are regenerated by His Spirit and grace and to these He is an "everlasting Father". We may look at God in unbelief and still call Him Father as in the Lord's Prayer. God is by nature the Father of all living by creation. Yet it is only when we are born again that He becomes in reality, in fact and indeed our Father. It is by this process of adoption that we become sons. *Eph 1:5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.* I am adopted by Jesus and that makes Him my Father.

1Pe 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Because this is not simply a forensic or legal act but a spiritual reality I can respond from my heart. This is the new birth. People who are not born again are not in the family. *Gal 4:6 And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.*

Also in Romans we read. *Rom 8:15 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.* Now here is a question. Does the cry "Abba Father" apply to the first person of the Godhead or to the second person Jesus? I would say reverently we are looking at Jesus as Abba, the eternal Father. For us He secures eternal life, He is eternal life, He shares His immortality, He shares His everlasting mansions and He gives us eternal peace. This is the message of the child who is born to US. The sickly Christian message of a baby withering on an advent calendar, hung up with the trappings of paganism, boxed and stored after 12 days could not be further from the truth of God's message. The child becomes the Father.

Jesus the Immanuel

Heb 12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

Let us look at Jesus as the Immanuel. *Isa 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Mat 1:23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.*

Immanuel means "God with us" an appropriate title for Jesus among men but originally it was a sign to the house of Ahaz. Isaiah had in view a particular virgin, the mother of the true Immanuel. Like many other prophecies it had a double, a typical and a true fulfilment. The first was in the reign of Ahaz concerning a temporal deliverance but the higher reference is to the spiritual Deliverer of the world. The first is the type, the second is the great event that inspired the message. A virgin birth is not unique. (Question: Was Adam a virgin birth?)

Immanuel, in the book of Isaiah, is a presage of God's judgement upon the nation of Israel. (See chapters 7 and 8). If we are to have God with us we too have to go through that judgement that exposes our evil. It is only when we emerge from that through the forgiveness of Christ can we ever begin a relationship with God.

We all like to think that God is with us but what God? What does it mean to have God with us? What does it mean in an experiential or experimental way rather than a theoretical way? Before Christ found me God was a complete mystery manipulated by men in funny clothes. I prayed to whom, I know not what? My communion with God was through the belief of others. I saw God only as others who said they knew Him described Him. God was not with me in any immediate sense. I had no experiential knowledge of God. He was not part of my daily life and I never read my Bible for myself to find out about Him. I was content to be a religious passenger.

If that is your state then God is not personal to you. You have no walk with God. I like this easy-to-read translation of Genesis. *Gen 5:24 One day Enoch was walking with God, and he disappeared. God took him.* The Bible talks of people who walked with God and clearly Enoch had such a close walk that he just wandered away with God from earth to heaven. I am sure that some of us might aspire to that close walk and we might have in mind others who serve as examples, Muller, Spurgeon, Wesley, Whitfield, Moody, Watts, Newton, etc. Let me make a point here though that we should not confuse their works with their walk. You may not aspire to be a great evangelist (these are God's gifts) but it doesn't mean that you have a lesser walk with God because of that.

When Jesus says that: *Joh 10:3 ...the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.* It is saying that the sheep all have a personal relationship with the Shepherd. That relationship is not defined by any other than the shepherd and the sheep. The relationships that I make in life with others are not governed by you they are personal to me. It is like the relationships we have with each other they are all personal and different. There is no single pattern. We need to make our own experiment and we must not interfere in each other's experience.

For sure there are commonalities in our experience. We are saved by grace through faith, we are blood brought sons of God but where we go and what we do from then onwards may be quite different. It will be different because the circumstances of our life are different, the times in which we live and the needs of those times differ. The geographical location and politics will present different challenges. Life cannot be the same for two people and as a result I think that our walk with God, our experiment or experience will differ in turn.

That is the challenge and encouragement I would like to give you. A challenge to deepen and personalise your relationship with your Creator. Can you become like Abraham? *Jas 2:23 And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.* He didn't just sing "What a friend we have in Jesus" for him it was a fact of daily life.

Johannes Kepler was born in 1571 in Germany. He became a famous mathematician, astronomer, inventor and writer of the first science fiction novel. Above all he was a Christian whose family was Lutheran. As such he adhered to the "Augsburg Confession" a defining document for Lutheranism. However he did not adhere to the Lutheran position on the real presence and refused to sign the "Formula of Concord". Because of his refusal he was excluded from the sacrament in the Lutheran church. He did not like Confessions as he saw them as divisive and limiting the expression of personal experience.

In our previous study we encouraged the development of a personal friendship with Christ. One defined by you and not the church. There are many who see the "church" as a governing body defining and controlling faith. That is not the Biblical view of the church. The church is merely the assembly of believers. *Heb 12:23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.* The church is subject to Christ and none other. *Eph 5:24 Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.* Your duty is not to be subjected to "church" but to Christ and you have every right to disagree with the church when it does not follow Christ.

Christ also recognises the liberty of conscience. The liberty of conscience is based upon the level of knowledge and faith that an individual possesses. *1Co 8:10 For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's Temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; 1Co 8:12 But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ.* When David said: *Psa 18:35 Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy right hand hath holden me up, and thy gentleness hath made me great.* He was acknowledging the fact that God deals very kindly and gently with our weakness. More than we deserve and no doubt far more gently than we are prepared to deal with others.

You see Christ has different levels of relationships with His people. Like any relationship it changes, matures, improves and becomes more intimate with time. Where an individual is with Christ, is between them and them alone! *Rom 14:1 Welcome all the Lord's followers, even those whose faith is weak.* Don't criticize them for having beliefs that are different from yours. Remember the question

that Peter asked Jesus? *Joh 21:21 Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.* In other words mind your own business Peter and concentrate on your walk with me!

A sign of the relationship with Jesus our Emmanuel is that it will change and develop. It will grow as you get older in it because you work at it. *Act 24:16 And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.* It is growth. *2Pe 3:18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.* Do not be constricted by other people's experience or feel that you must imitate their lives. God has a life for you alone, a special place carved for you in eternity. Only you can fit it. When Paul says: *1Co 11:1 Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.* He is saying do not try and become me Paul. Follow the "Christ" bits but never follow the Paul bits.

This means that my work as a teacher in the church is not to squeeze you into a one-size-fits-all Jesus jelly mould of my making. It is to provide you with the knowledge and direction to enable you to build your own relationship with Jesus. *1Co 3:10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. 1Co 3:11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

Jesus the Cornerstone

Heb 12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

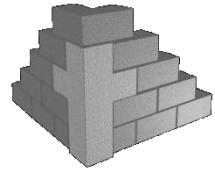
Here we look at Jesus as the Corner Stone or rather Chief Corner Stone. *Eph 2:20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; Eph 2:21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy Temple in the Lord: Eph 2:22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.* The context specifically refers to the Cornerstone of the body of Christ. The Church with big "C" not local churches with the little "c".

We started with an encouragement to deepen our personal relationship with Jesus that is not defined by the little "c" church. We are not dependent upon them for that relationship. Here in our text we are looking at our relationship with Jesus in the wider context of how I fit in with the Universal Church of the big "C". Do you ever think of that? I tried to get out of my box and see it from Jesus' point of view. He sees the past generations, the present and the future while remaining the same to all of them. *Heb 13:8 Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.* He sees us as new born babies of faith growing in the faith, hopefully maturing and then passing through the veil to meet Him in person.

While He is labouring with one in new birth, He is at the same time closing the life of another. He is rejoicing at a wedding, the same day that he weeps with mourners. He rides the storms of life and

paints the sunsets. He holds the Universe in his hand and counts the fallen sparrow. Such is the Cornerstone of faith upon which we build, yet do we?

What is a Cornerstone? Cornerstones are part of the structure of a masonry wall at the corner where two walls meet for the purpose of reinforcement. When they are larger than the stones in the rest of the wall they are also called quoins and large quoins add strength both physically and visually. It is the starting point for building. Christianity we might suppose would start from this Cornerstone but it doesn't. I do not see many churches today holding Christ as the Cornerstone. The building is crooked and unstable because it doesn't square with Christ neither is it reinforced by Him. They cannot say with the Psalmist: *Psa 118:14 The LORD is my strength and song.*



Churches have insulated themselves from the influence of Christ by neglect. Once churches moved out of the home into congregational centres it wasn't long before Christianity became a once a week Sunday affair rather than a seven daily affair. Yet the home was the church originally. *Rom 16:3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila Likewise greet the church that is in their house.* I remember how uncomfortable I felt when I first encountered churches in homes. It didn't seem right or reverent to do so. Yet that is exactly the issue our homes should be places where our religion flourishes, where it is personal and not in some distant "steeple house" as George Fox called the buildings. We should never "go to church" we should wake up in church! It's our Home.

Job's home was his church. *Job 1:5 And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.* It was Job's powerbase with God. It is important that we try to understand this point and how and why Christianity moved away from this.

If Jesus really is the Cornerstone of the local churches we must ask ourselves why do we not see the marks of discipleship in its members that we see in scripture? Why do we not see the spiritual development and maturity in people who have spent years attending church? *Act 2:42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

We must question the purpose of a church in relation to Christ the Cornerstone.

Psa 118:22 The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. We started to question the purpose of the local church or congregation and whether it is a Biblical phenomenon. People tend to accept it "as is", because it was there when they were born (again?) and it has always been part of the landscape. Yet you will find no formula in scripture for the structuring and format of churches. You will though find a lot about Christian character, morality, duty, worship and use of gifts. Are these activities specifically to be associated with churches or can they exist without the need for churches or congregations?

We took a straw poll some time ago about what we would look for in a church. It seems that we would look for things that are in our comfort zone. Things like particular doctrines, worship styles

and forms. Something that we could merge into. We look for churches or congregations to meet our present need not our future development.

Churches with a small “c” are nominally gatherings of believers. *1Co 11:20 When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. 1Co 14:23 If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?* They gathered together to share faith, gifts and build each other up (edify). However what we see in these days is a closed group of people, perpetuating a particular brand of Christianity managed by a group of people set against change, managing people who are indifferent to the Gospel. They are content with what they have.

If you think that I am being unduly harsh then I suggest that you go to the leaders of these churches and present them with a teaching that they do not practice (say hair covering, plural elders, baptism etc) and see the response you get (See the letter below as an example). You will be shown the door. They do not want to change the way they are and it is clear that Christ is not their cornerstone. It is not a new thing because John encountered it. *3Jn 1:9 I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.* This is in opposition to Christ the head. *Col 1:18 And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.* That is Christ the Cornerstone.

Have you noticed how happy churches are to push a collection beg at you? They are happy to take your money, they never say thank you, you have no idea where it is being used and they don't care how you got it in the first place. But woe betides you if you shake the tree and start asking questions. Churches are mainly closed shops, because they serve a system not Christ or the believer. They exist to perpetuate themselves and change is not part of that.

Faith becomes a matter of indifference rather than an ideal to defend. *Jud 1:3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.* The stone has been rejected by the builders and you can see the results. For many the answer is to accept the status quo and argue that you will never find the perfect church.

This is a “cop out” by lazy people, people who are not prepared to contend for the faith. Well here is the good news; you don't have to go to a church. There is no law of God which says you have to go to a Catholic church, an Anglican church, a Baptist church or any other church, especially where those groups do not support an ongoing search for the truth and practice of the gospel. Definitely not where Christ is not the Cornerstone.

Many churches throughout history have tried to dominate Christians rather than empower them and liberate them. The Conventicle Act of 1664 was an Act of the Parliament of England that prohibited religious assemblies of more than five people outside of the Church of England of which John Bunyan was a victim. This law aimed to discourage nonconformism and to strengthen the position of the Established Church.

The Christian (Plymouth) Brethren (Darbyites, Tayorites, Kelly etc) are another example of

exclusivism. Rather than liberate Christ in the community it restricts Christ and I can only conclude that it has its origin in the devil because Christ does not do that. *Col 2:8 Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.* Jesus was not exclusive. *Mar 9:38 And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us.* *Mar 9:39 But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me.* *Mar 9:40 For he that is not against us is on our part.* *Mar 9:41 For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.* The church exists to “liberate to serve” and as such it is a servant of Christ’s mission. *Joh 8:32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.* Not enslave.

We have questioned “Why go to church?” but let us ask another question, “Why go to your church?” How would you answer that? Can you say “Because we are encouraging Christians to grow, equipping them to stand and fight for Christ in Today’s world”? If not what’s the point? I can sing hymns in the bath or watch songs of Praise on TV, see sermons on The God Channel, give money to charities on-line and pray in my lounge. What benefits are there in joining with others? You will notice in the New Testament that no one is told to go to church. They meet because they want to because they love each other and they have common mission. *Act 2:42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.* When scripture says, *Heb 10:25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*

I think it is encouraging us **TO BE** a church rather than **GO** to church. Where and how you meet is not specified.

I also think that many churches will do you more harm than good. They should have a health warning on the door, “Coming in here will undermine your faith”. *2Pe 3:17 beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness.*

So here we are in the 21st century surrounded by all sorts of churches and how do we choose one? Should we choose one over another? Well, if you choose to meet with other Christians it should be with an open Bible as did Paul. *Act 20:27 For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.* Once you limit the council of God you form a sect and the Cornerstone is rejected.

What does this mean then if we cannot in all conscience meet with a local church? Does it mean that we cannot worship or cannot pursue our faith? Absolutely not. In fact I would say that your faith is defective if you could only pursue it by going to a local church. Supporting Reading football club doesn’t make you a Reading player! By the same token not being a Reading supporter does not mean that you cannot play football. Jesus said that, *Mar 12:29 ...The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.* Love is about obedience, *Joh 14:15 If ye love me, keep my commandments.* The fact is that you must serve Him everywhere, in everything you do. That is worship.

What would Paul have made of the internet? Is it an opportunity or a threat? For many people change is a threat possibly because it is unknown territory, probably because they are too lazy to find out about it. It has been said that there are three groups of people when it comes to the Future. Those who will watch what happens, those who will make it happen and those who will wonder what happened. I think that most churches fall into the first and third category. New forms of worship and communication are an opportunity to propagate the Gospel. Just recall the impact that the printing press and Bible translations had on the grip of the State churches freeing millions of believers. It was the internet of its day. It got Christians out of the box and the control of men.

Churches without Christ the Cornerstone are of little use. That doesn't make Christ of little use and it should encourage us to rise above the powerless forms of worship. Paul tells us this is an "end time" phenomenon. *2Ti 3:5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.* We should suitably equip ourselves to meet the signs of the times.

Plot 64
Brym Park Estate
Flint

Dear Mr Winnett

23rd Feb 81

I acknowledge receipt of your letter to me dated 5th February 1981, together with an enclosed letter addressed to the church at Flint.

After consideration by the Elders it was decided that your 'open letter' to the church at Flint be returned to you unopened. We do not regard such an approach by you as having any validity within the church at Flint.

There are many urgent and serious matters facing the Lord's People in this land and at this time and we are acutely aware of problems within our own Fellowship. We do not know whether you are in regular and committed relationship with a 'local church' in the Body of Christ, but we respectfully suggest you devote your fullest efforts in a constructive labour and witness where the Lord has put you and under the rule of those whom the Lord will set over you.

The Lord be with you:

Gilbert T. Evans
Pastor

This letter is right out of Diotrephes methodology. *3Jn 1:9 I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not.* Notice the reasoning. My approach (writing an epistle or letter) is not valid for the church at Flint and we do not receive it. It's not "constructive labour". That's another way of saying "mind your own business" our church is no part of any other church and doesn't have to fellowship with them.

I must also be under the rule of people the Lord will set over me. Presumably people like them are self-appointed in their own image. That's another way of saying you should shut up and be in subjection to men like us.

Don't contend for the faith be content with the status quo. Well he will answer to God as I will.

Jesus the Rock

We look now at Jesus as the Rock and the Rock of Offence.

1Co 10:4 And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them and that Rock was Christ. 1Pe 2:8 And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.

Augustus M. Toplady wrote the famous hymn "Rock of Ages" while sheltering from a storm in the Mendip hills. It was sung at the funeral of William Gladstone in Westminster Abbey. Prince Albert asked it be sung to him as he lay dying. Sankey's song "The Lord's our Rock, in him we hide, A shelter in the time of storm" takes the same theme drawn presumably, from Moses encounter with God. *Exo 33:22 And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by:*

Nice sentiments but do you see what confusion these hymns can bring? We do not need to hide from God nor do we need to hide from the world. We are in Christ. We are laying siege to the gates of Hades. *Mat 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.* We don't need rocks to hide in we need rocks to drink from and that is the theme of our text.

You will also notice that the Rock followed them they did not follow the Rock. God's people are not given the logistical task of searching for supplies in their journey through life. They are not foragers with a God who owns all the resources on a thousand hills. Our task is not that. Our task is to be an example to the World to bring Christ before the World through our lives. Spurgeon said, "A Christian is not to be a village in a valley but a city set upon a hill, he is not to be a candle under a bushel but a candle in a candlestick, giving light to all. Retirement may be lovely in its season and to hide one's self is doubtless modest but the hiding of Christ in us can never be justified and the keeping back of truth which is precious to ourselves is a sin against others and an offence against God".

The Rock provided water, spiritual water. Ask yourself do you thirst for this or do you just want the occasional glass? You don't mind having a drink with others but apart from that it's not a regular activity. In the natural there would be something very wrong with a person who stopped drinking

water or lacked a thirst. So here is a test. *Joh 4:14 But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well (lit: fountain) of water springing up into everlasting life.* If the water of Christ is in an individual it will show itself as a fountain. Christ and His word will bubble and spring from the life of that person. The life of Christ cannot be hid.

There is another lesson here. Just because you think that you can enjoy benefits from God does not make you a beneficiary of God's kingdom. *1Co 10:5 But with many of them God was not well pleased.* If you do not behave in a manner fitting for God's people you cannot expect to enter the Promised Land. If we are serious about Christ forgiving us then we must be serious about Him radically changing us. *Rom 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.* A mind that does not come into alignment with the mind of Christ is not part of Him. *Php 2:5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:* It refuses to be humble before God.

Christ the Rock can also be an occasion of stumbling. *1Pe 2:8 And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.* The people tripped over the word because they refused to believe it. Therefore, this is how they ended up. That is where we see Christ not just as a Rock but a "Touchstone". A touchstone was used to test the quality of Gold or other minerals from the colour of the mark it left. Christ the Rock does this by testing the reaction to His word. Unbelievers trip over it and you will see many people who call themselves Christians stumbling over the word through unbelief. That is because they are unbelievers. Believers don't do that. Believers translate hearing into doing. *Jas 1:22 But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.*

Light of the World

We now look at Jesus as the Light of the world. *Joh 8:12 Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.* *Joh 1:9 That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.*

We take our domestic lights for granted in our day and age but can you imagine a time not so long ago when it was a luxury? In Tudor times you would get up when the sun came up and go to bed when the sun set. The only light in your house came from the fire or from rush lights (candles made from reeds dipped in animal fat) which gave off very little light and stank. You got home in time to eat your last meal of the day in daylight and then it was bedtime for most people. You can imagine what fears the dark conjured up in the imagination during the long winter nights? We had a taste of it in the United Kingdom in 1973 with power cuts.

Even today a quarter of humanity lives without electricity (1.6Bn people) burning unhealthy kerosene lamps, spending as much as 30% of their income on a fuel that causes indoor air pollution and fires. Can you imagine how light alone can change the domestic lives of people?

It seems so obvious that we need light to navigate our way around that we scarcely consider it and in glory darkness will be a thing of the past. *Rev 22:5 And there shall be no night there; and they*

need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever. There is a reminder here that in the beginning there was light without the light bearer (the sun).

Have you ever wondered why God created light? Why we are so dependent upon it? God could have made other ways to navigate without eyes but light is a figure for God Himself. It was a way to show Himself to the world. *Joh 9:5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.* Light and sight was a way to present things to the mind that touch, hearing, smell and taste could never do. Also God Himself has “eyes” but He sees far more than we do. *Pro 15:3 The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.* They can see morality.

God enlightens us in Christ so that with the once blind man we can exclaim, “Now, I see!” *Joh 1:9 That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.* There is a true light and by the same token there must be a false light, remember the angel of light? Now God says. *Psa 32:8 I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.* In other words you can borrow My eyes. If you want to you can see the world as I see it. You will see that moral dimension that natural blind men cannot. It’s up to you?

I am not sure whether many Christians understand this point. The world you see is not necessarily the world that God is looking at. You may see good in everybody God doesn’t, *Mar 10:18 And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God.* You may believe God doesn’t create evil, but He does. *Isa 45:7 I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.* You may believe all ways to God are valid God doesn’t. *Joh 14:6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.* God’s view of the World can be totally different to the view that we have.

If Christ is the light of the world and Jesus lightens that world why do so many people who call themselves Christians hold such different views to Christ? Why does the Church of England allow the ordination of gay priests as long as they are celibate? What is clear is that the Christian (Christ’s) world view is not part of the life of many religious people. Their view is a synthesis, a composite of other non-Christian ideas which determine what they believe. If George Barna’s assessment of US churches holds valid for the UK then we see that only 14% of born again adults rely on the Bible as their moral compass. We shall see how at variance we are with Jesus world view and method.

Joh 3:19 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the World, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. Evil loves the cover of darkness, evil espouses ignorance. You have probably seen the letters WWJD (What would Jesus do?). Today, I want to ask, “What would Jesus think?” (WWJT). I want to try and find out what Jesus’ World view was (the overall perspective from which Jesus sees and interprets the World) and ask if we have the same view as He does. The first question we should ask is do we want the Light of Christ in our thoughts or not? *Psa 10:4 The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.* The German Christian astronomer Johannes Kepler said that through his study of the Universe he was “thinking God’s thoughts after him.” Why limit it to astronomy?

Herman Dooyeweerd (1894 - 1977) was a Dutch Christian philosopher who suggested that the Christian's basic orientation to the World ought not to be derived from human speculation but from God's revealed purposes: Creation, the Fall into sin and Redemption in Christ. In other words a World view that should not proceed from our experience of everyday life as we see it (he called this naive experience).

Showed that all philosophy is derived from this "naïve" World view and that "theoretical thought" (posh words for "your philosophy") derived from this would contain error. What he is saying is that you cannot escape the way you were brought up as it will affect the way you think and your outlook on life. The Jesuit maxim went, "Give me the child for seven years, and I will give you the man." We are what we were fed upon.

Let us consider some of the things which have shaped our views of the World around us. Our country of birth, our time and culture, our socio-economic group, our parents and the way they did things, our media exposure, our teachers and what we learned at school, our religion to name a few. These influences mould our beliefs on our origins, the origin of life, the origin of the universe, the nature of law and punishment, morality and moral absolutes, human relationships, truth, religion and death and so on. We are to a very large extent the product of our genes and their environment.

Yet Jesus says that all of that lies in darkness and that philosophy cannot find Him. *1Co 1:18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. 1Co 1:19 For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. 1Co 1:20 Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this World? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this World?* You cannot reason your way to God it comes by the special revelation of the cross of Christ. The cross lights our World.

A definition of philosophy is the investigation of the nature, causes or principles of reality, knowledge or values, based on logical reasoning (is this possible with a corrupt heart and a sinful mind?) rather than empirical (provable) methods. It is the pursuit of wisdom. God says that without Him your wisdom is foolishness and He will actively destroy it. Any philosophy class that does not involve the Crucified Christ is doomed to failure. It is unlit and unenlightened philosophy.

The fact is that the unregenerate (not-Christian) mind cannot know the truth. *1Co 2:14 But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. 1Co 2:16 For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.*

That mind is developed by a process of renewal. *Rom 12:2 Don't be like the people of this World, but let God change the way you think. Then you will know how to do everything that is good and pleasing to him.* CEV.

The point that we arrive at is this. That you can try to work your way through life as a Christian using your old way of thinking your naive thoughts or you can transform your mind and start to think things through as Jesus would have done. Instead of using your corrupt World view you start to develop a World view that aligns with Jesus World view.

As in all things, it becomes a choice:

Jos 24:15 And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.